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ABSTRACT

A study addressed educational and psychological issues raised by the phenomenal growth of Irish-medium pre-schools ("naionrai"). Data were gathered in surveys of almost 2,000 parents, over 170 teachers and advisors, and 225 children in 25 Irish-medium pre-schools in both "Gaeltacht" (Irish-speaking districts) and "Galltacht" (English-speaking districts) areas were tested for cognitive and linguistic development. Results indicate that children make significant advances in Irish language development during their time in the "naionrai," which leads to increased use of Irish in their homes as their parents try to help them acquire the language. Many recommendations for future development of the "naionrai" are included. The report is presented in both English and Irish. The survey forms are appended. Contains 296 references. (MSE)

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Early Immersion Education in Ireland: Na Naíonraí

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The phenomenal growth of the *naionrai* or Irish-medium play-schools has raised many educational and psychological questions that are addressed here in a large-scale scientific study. Data were gathered from all of those directly involved in the *naionrai*. Almost 2,000 parents and over 170 teachers and advisors took part in the survey. In addition, 225 children were tested for cognitive and linguistic development in 25 Irish-medium pre-schools throughout the country, in both Galltacht and Gaeltacht areas. The study shows that children make significant advances in Irish during their period in the *naionra*, which leads to increased use of Irish in their homes as well, as their parents try to help them in their efforts to acquire the language. The report contains many recommendations for the future development of the *naionrai*.

The author, Tina Hickey, is a Research Officer in the Department of Psycholinguistics in ITÉ.

De réir mar a leath na naionrai lán-Ghaeilge ar fud na tire, cuireadh ceisteanna mar gheall ar an tionchar a bhionn acu ar na páisti, ó thaobh an oideachais agus na siceolaiochta de, agus is éard atá sa tuarascáil seo ná iarracht ar na ceisteanna seo a fhreagairt tri thaighde eolaiochtúil. Bailiodh sonrai ó beagnach 2,000 tuismitheoir agus ó nios mó ná 170 múinteoir agus comhairleoir. Chomh maith leis sin, rinneadh tástáil ar 225 páisti i 25 naionrai i ngach cuid den tír, idir Ghalltacht agus Ghaeltacht, maidir leis an dul chun cinn a bhi á dhéanamh acu ó thaobh teanga agus intleachta de. Taispeántar go ndéanann na páisti dul chun cinn suntasach sa Ghaeilge le linn dóibh a bheith sna naionrai, agus go gcuirtear chomh maith leis an méid Gaeilge a úsáidtear ina dteaghlaigh féin, de bharr go ndeineann na tuismitheoiri iarracht cuidiú leo chun an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim. Tá go leor moltai sa tuarascáil faoi fhorbairt na naionrai sna blianta atá romhainn.

Is Oifigeach Taighde i Tina Hickey i Roinn na Sictheangeolaiochta in Institiúid Teangeolaiochta Éireann.

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Early Immersion Education in Ireland: Na Naíonraí

Tina Hickey

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann

In memory of my parents
Mae and Paddy Hickey

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Chapter 1

Pre-schooling and Early Immersion

1.1 Background to the Study

A *naíonra* is an Irish-medium pre-school,[1] in which a *Stiúrthóir*[1], or Leader, speaks only Irish in interacting with the children, usually aged between three and five years of age. The majority of the children attending naíonraí are from English-speaking homes, so the naíonra is, for them, an early immersion in Irish. A minority of children attending naíonraí come from Irish-speaking homes either in the *Gaeltacht*[1] (Irish-speaking districts, mainly located on the western seaboard) or in the *Galltacht* (English-speaking areas, i.e. most of the Republic) and for this group the naíonra offers mother-tongue support, as well as exposure to English from the other children.

This study sets out to provide, for the first time, a comprehensive overview of the naíonra experience in the Republic of Ireland, including:

- a profile of the characteristics of naíonra parents, children and Stiúrthóirí
- the views of parents and Stiúrthóirí regarding the naíonra, and
- a profile of the Irish competence of a sample of naíonra children, in terms of their ability to comprehend, produce and imitate Irish utterances.

A key aim of the study is the examination of the factors leading to success in Irish language acquisition in the naíonra setting.

Earlier studies of the naíonraí have had a more limited scope, allowing a more detailed examination of individual children. Egan (1981) carried out a pilot study of 20 naíonraí and 80 children, and gave the first overview of this experience of early immersion in Ireland. Ní Mhí (1986) conducted a small survey of 10 naíonraí, and this was followed in more recent years by in-depth case studies by Owens (1992) and Mhic Mhathúna (1993). However, no large-scale study of the naíonraí involving parents as well as Leaders, and testing a large sample of children, had previously been carried out. In 1992, *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* received support from the European Commission's Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth for such a study. It was decided to carry out a large-scale research project, in co-operation with *Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann*. This report comprises the results of this study of the children, parents, Stiúrthóirí (Leaders) and *Comhairleoirí* (Advisors) involved in the naíonraí.

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[1] Irish terms are presented first in italics and glossed in the text. Such terms are included in the Glossary.

It is important to be clear about what this study does and does not aim to do. It sets out to determine the factors which contribute to successful Irish acquisition within the naíonraí, in a descriptive and evaluative overview. It aims to profile the parents who choose naíonraí for their children, in order to assess the relevant characteristics of this group and their needs. It also aims to study the Stiúrthóirí, in terms of qualifications and practices. Given the strict time restrictions imposed on the preparation and data collection period by the funding body, it could not, and does not attempt to compare this type of pre-school provision with other types currently available in Ireland. Nor was it possible to study a group of naíonra children and a control group longitudinally, since only six months were available to organise the project and engage in data collection. In addition, it was not feasible to attempt case studies of individual children in the naíonraí. Instead, this study builds on the information provided at the micro-level by earlier case studies and attempts to extend this information to the macro-level through providing assessments of all the adult participants, and testing the Irish competence of a large sample of children.

This chapter gives a brief review of some of the research relating to pre-schooling and early immersion. Section 1.2 details the development of naíonraí, and describes the aims of this movement and the methods used. Section 1.3 briefly discusses pre-schooling in general in Ireland, with estimates of the numbers involved. Section 1.4 reviews some of the research on pre-school education in other countries, and discusses the issue of high quality pre-schooling. Section 1.5 examines the development of early immersion, including a brief review of two case studies of early immersion in Lesser-Used Languages. Section 1.6 summarises the research questions and Section 1.7 presents the conclusions of this review.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE NAÍONRAÍ

Mhic Mhathúna (1993) reviewed the history of the naíonra movement, and the following draws heavily on her account. In the 1960s there was concern among the supporters of the language that Irish was being accorded a lower status in the schools than heretofore, in addition to the recognition of a shift away from Irish-medium teaching in primary and secondary schools and Colleges of Education. Contact with the recently formed Welsh-medium playgroups indicated that pre-school immersion might provide a model for establishing a sound base for Irish among young children. *Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge* and *Conradh na Gaeilge* publicised and promoted the concept of Irish-medium pre-schools as an aid in counteracting the decline in Irish. The first naíonra was set up in 1968 and 26 had opened by 1978 (Mhic Mhathúna 1993:10).

In 1974 Conradh na Gaeilge brought together the Stiúrthóirí of the existing Irish-medium pre-schools (at that time called *naíscoileanna*) for a seminar attended by Welsh experts.

Following this meeting an organisation, *Na Naiscoileanna Gaelacha*, was founded, which aimed to inform and educate its members regarding the principles of immersion education and pre-school children's development. The constitution of this organisation gave as its aims the founding of Irish-medium pre-schools throughout the country, the education of its members and the promotion of public awareness and sympathy for the aims of Irish-medium education. This organisation later changed its name to *Na Naionrai Gaelacha* in 1978, to highlight the pedagogical approach advocated, which was a combination of the positive aspects both of the pre-school and the playgroup.

Na Naionrai Gaelacha played a pioneering role in organising and developing early Irish immersion and their development plan in 1978 placed them on a firmer footing, with its recommendations for training, publishing and further development. As a result, a joint committee between *Bord na Gaeilge* (the state body whose remit is the promotion of the Irish language) and Na Naionrai Gaelacha was founded in 1978, with the title An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta. This body is funded and given administrative support by Bord na Gaeilge and aims to co-ordinate the naionrai already functioning, and to facilitate the setting up of new naionrai. It has been singularly successful in promoting the spread of naionrai, which show a steep increase since 1983 especially, to 190[1] in 1993. Details of the geographical spread of naionrai are provided in Chapter 2. Naionrai exist both in Irish-speaking (Gaeltacht) and English-speaking (Galltacht) districts and those in the Gaeltacht have, since 1980, received a subsidy from Údarás na Gaeltachta for each child attending.

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta provides a range of other services to naionrai, including a pre-service training course for Stiúrthóiri, a starter-kit of equipment for new naionrai, a group insurance scheme, an Advisor scheme whereby each naionra is visited regularly by a regional Comhairleoir, occasional lectures open to Stiúrthóiri and parents (in cooperation with Na Naionrai Gaelacha) and a wide range of materials (see An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta, *Catalóg*) such as tapes of songs and rhymes, wall friezes, a training videotape, and a handbook for Stiúrthóiri.

Apart from the activities of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta, Na Naionrai Gaelacha continue their own activities (funded by members' contributions and an annual grant from Conradh na Gaeilge) aimed at establishing a network of naionrai, safeguarding the right of every child to choose an Irish-medium education, and promoting public understanding of the aims and methods of Irish-medium pre-schooling. It organises a national day each year when most naionrai go on a tour or picnic, and it provides some regional seminars allowing Stiúrthóirí to meet and discuss any issues and problems arising from their experience in running a naionra.

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[1] Following a Census of all naionrai, the figure of 190 naionra sessions was reached for Spring term 1993, 138 in English-speaking districts (henceforth referred to as *Galltacht*) and 52 in Irish-speaking (*Gaeltacht*) districts. This figure differs from the totals given in the annual reports of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta because in their reckoning, all naionrai with more than 10 children in the Gaeltacht are counted as double naionrai, whereas in this study, sessions were counted as a group of any size meeting for one period with a Stiúrthóir (and, in some cases, an assistant).

1.2.1 What is a Naionra?

The booklet *An Tuismitheoir agus an Naionra* (The Naionra Explained for Parents) (Na Naionraí Gaelacha, 1994) gives the following definition of a naionra:

> A naionra is a group of children of between 3-5 years of age, who come together for a few hours each day, under the guidance of a Stiúrthóir or leader, to play and to learn through play.....The naionra has two main objectives:
>
> - to help the child to develop in every way;
> - to help the child to acquire Irish or to improve his/her knowledge of Irish by using it as the means of communication.
>
> Na Naionraí Gaelacha (1994:5)

The Stiúrthóir engages the children in stimulating, age-appropriate and enjoyable tasks through the medium of Irish. Naionraí sessions last between two and three hours, usually every weekday, or at least several times a week. Stiúrthóirí speak only Irish, but they respond to English utterances from the children and encourage them to use their developing Irish.

The rationale behind the naionra movement is threefold. It is based on the belief that:

1) pre-school education is beneficial to the child, family and community;
2) young children acquire a second language naturally in appropriate conditions;
3) pre-schooling through Irish assists in expanding the use of Irish in the realm of the family, which in turn helps to promote integration in the community.

Fishman (1991), on the basis of assumption 3) above, would categorise the naionra movement as an effort at reversing language shift. However, the naionra's emphasis on the acquisition of Irish is placed in the context of the child's overall personal, social, cognitive and motor development, which is also catered for and promoted. Ó Murchú (1985) emphasises this point in *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí Naionraí* (Handbook for Naionra Leaders):

> *...an dá ghné is tábhachtaí de chúram stiúrthóra Naionra:*
> *a) forbairt iomlán an pháiste trí mhodhanna súgartha;*
> *b) sealbhú agus saibhriú na Gaeilge.*
> (...the two most important aspects of the work of a naionra Stiúrthóir are
> a) the overall development of the child through play; and
> b) the acquisition and enrichment of Irish.)
>
> Ó Murchú (1985:7)

1.2.2 The Pedagogical Approach

The pedagogical approach advocated by Ó Murchú (1985:12-13) in *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí Naíonraí* (Handbook for Stiúrthóirí) aims to offer teaching which is informal and centred around the child's needs (particularly with regard to language), in a structured environment which offers stimulation through a wide range of toys and activities, and in an atmosphere of controlled freedom. The central activities recommended by Ní Ailpín (1985) in the handbook include painting and drawing, building blocks, sand, water, jigsaws, clay and dough, story-telling, songs and rhymes, and a 'home corner' for symbolic play. While the child is engaged in these activities the Stiúrthóir presents the appropriate language, either in simple phrases or sentences or in rhymes or songs, to describe or comment on the children's actions, and the new language is therefore always tied to a meaningful context. The intention is that the Irish heard in the naíonra should be naturally linked to the child's life, interests and needs, rather than based on structural language-teaching methods.

About three-quarters of all children attending naíonraí (see Section 2.2.7) speak only English at home, and in the naíonra they acquire basic Irish language skills while they are engaged in a range of stimulating activities. Another fifth of all naíonra children come from homes where both English and Irish are used, while the remainder come from Irish-speaking homes. While most of the latter are located in the Gaeltacht, a small number are in English-speaking districts, especially in Dublin. This mix of Irish ability can create difficulties and requires a flexible approach by the Stiúrthóir in presenting Irish to the beginners and in enriching the language of children who already speak Irish.

1.3 PRE-SCHOOLING IN IRELAND

A sharp increase in the demand for pre-schooling services has been noted in recent years, which coincides with increasing participation by women in the workforce. In most Western countries there is some provision of state-funded day-care services for pre-school children, with state regulation of the services provided. Gilligan (1991) attributes the impetus for such provision to the following four sources:

> 1) the late (by Irish standards) school entry age in many countries;
> 2) a commitment to removing child care responsibilities as an obstacle to participation by mothers (and fathers) in the labour force;
> 3) a belief in the educational and social value of day-care as a supplement to the child's normal family experiences;
> 4) a belief in the capacity of day-care experiences to compensate for adverse home and social circumstances.
>
> Gilligan (1991:136)

The term 'day-care' covers a wide range of services, including private child-minding, through full-time day nurseries, to part-time nurseries, playgroups and pre-schools. Babies and toddlers are generally cared for by relatives, private minders or in nurseries

(Nic Ghiolla Phádraig 1991) while playgroups and pre-schools are directed at somewhat older children, between about three and four years. This study will mainly concern itself with the latter group, but in this section there is some consideration of the numbers of younger children in day-care services also. There are three main groups providing pre-school services in the Republic: the Departments of Education and Health, and the private sector.

1.3.1 Department of Education

McKenna (1988) points out that in those countries in which it exists, pre-primary education is usually administered by the Department of Education. In Ireland, however, regulations of the Department of Education state that children must begin Primary School at age six, but should not be enrolled in the system until after their fourth birthday. Goutard's (1980) review of pre-school education in the European Community described the Irish system of pre-schooling as 'integrated into the school system', since it defined the education offered before the compulsory starting age as 'pre-primary'. The Primary Education Review Body (1990) noted that, since a high proportion of 4- and five-year-olds attend infant classes,

> much of what is considered pre-schooling in other countries is already incorporated in the primary school system in Ireland.
>
> Primary Education Review Body (1990:72)

Until 1994, with the exception of the Rutland St. Pre-school (an inner-city pre-school for disadvantaged children) and a limited number of partially-funded intervention programmes for traveller children, there was no official provision by the Department of Education in Ireland of pre-school education for children under four years, and all other children under four were deemed to be within the remit of the Department of Health.

In 1994, however, the Department of Education announced the setting up of a specialised pre-school programme called the 'Early Start' programme for officially designated disadvantaged areas (see INTO 1995 for more information on this programme). The Department sees its role in pre-school education as targeting the disadvantaged, and the overall aim of its pre-school programmes is to compensate for background deprivation. According to the White Paper on Education (1995:16), the Department bases its pre-school intervention programmes on three principal considerations:

- early childhood experiences are important for the child's development
- entry to formal schooling is a major transition for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
- early disadvantages affect the child's enduring experience within formal schooling, because such disadvantages tend to be both persistent and cumulative.

White Paper on Education (1995:16)

In autumn 1994 a limited number of these Early Start pre-schools began operation on the premises of local primary schools: six in Dublin and one each in Cork and Limerick. These pre-schools each cater for 60 pupils in two classrooms, where each class accommodates 15 children for two and a half hours in the morning and another 15 children in the afternoon session.

Children (including some with disabilities) are selected for this programme by school principals, in consultation with other bodies such as public health nurses and the social services, because they are identified as being 'at risk' of not developing to their full potential. After they have spent one year in Early Start these children continue to the Junior Infants class of the primary school. Two qualified primary teachers and two qualified child-care assistants are employed in each of the Early Start settings, and participating teachers receive in-service training and an induction programme.

The Department of Education allocates a start-up grant of £4,500 per Early Start classroom to purchase equipment, and a capitation rate of £55 per child is paid to the Board of Management of the base national school. In addition, a grant of £1,500 per annum is provided to each centre for the development of parental involvement, in order to facilitate the participation of parents in the organisation and work of the centre. The *Government of Renewal* (1994) policy document made a commitment to extend the scheme and it was implemented in another 25 (personal communication, Department of Education, April 1995) in autumn 1995, each catering for 60 children, thus bringing a further 1,500 children into the Early Start programme, a total of about 2,000.

The Department of Education also partly funds a pre-school service for traveller children, with over 40 pre-schools catering for over 400 children from the travelling community. In addition, there are local co-ordinators of the Home-School Liaison Project, who serve groups of schools in particularly disadvantaged areas. While they are primarily oriented towards establishing home-school links for school-age children, they nevertheless try to make contact with voluntary pre-schools in their area and with other voluntary and statutory groups in their area.

1.3.2 Department of Health

Under the 1970 Health Act, the Department of Health, operating through regional Health Boards, is empowered to provide grants to services catering for pre-school children in areas of social deprivation. Most of this funding goes to voluntary bodies operating day-care centres and community playgroups. The Department of Health has a policy to fund day-care for the children of chronically ill mothers or lone parents who work outside the home, and children considered to be disadvantaged for other reasons. Entry to such funded day-care is generally by recommendation from a Public Health Nurse, but the overall numbers attending such state-funded nurseries is low. In the Eastern Health Board region comprising Dublin city, Wicklow and Kildare, in 1993 there were 45 day nurseries serving up to 1,500 children approximately, aged between two and five years (personal communication, EHB, Sept. 1994) and operated by voluntary bodies such as religious orders, Barnardo's and the ISPCC. McKenna (1988:45) estimated the costs per child for this service were approximately £1,500 per annum at that time, up to 70% of which was at that time provided by the Eastern Health Board.

In addition to nurseries for younger children, there are also community playgroups, grant-aided by Dublin Corporation and County Council, and the health boards other than the Eastern Health Board. The remaining seven health boards catered for about 5,000 children in 1985 (McKenna 1988:44), some in nurseries but mainly in community playgroups[1]. Community playgroups are often managed by committees of parents, and parents also assist the play leader. The active involvement of parents is considered to be critical to the achievement of satisfactory results by a community playgroup. McKenna (1988) cited costs of between £110 and £200 per year per child for community playgroups. These costs tend to be distributed between the health board, other agencies and the parents, with parents paying up to 50% in some cases, either individually or through fund-raising activities.

1.3.3 Private Sector Pre-schooling

Outside of such funded day-care, Hennessy and Hayes (1994) found that most day-care is privately organised and funded by parents, either where the child is cared for in a relative's or minder's home, in the child's own home by a nanny or au pair, in a private crèche or in a playgroup. There is no subsidy for such private child-care, and it is widely believed that much 'at-home' child-minding takes place outside the tax and social welfare systems.

Various types of private playgroups exist in Ireland, usually for children aged three to four years approximately, and these are dependent usually on fees charged to parents and fund-raising. The Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association (IPPA) is the umbrella body for English-medium playgroups throughout Ireland. In 1993 there were 1,460 such groups (IPPA Statistics 1994), which catered for 19,757 children, and involved 2,539 adults. The approach of the IPPA is to emphasise the total development of the child in an environment which is rich in opportunities for exploration and challenge.

The survey of naíonraí detailed in Chapter 2 showed that a further 2,500 children approximately were enrolled in the Irish-medium naíonraí in February 1993, representing about 2.5% of the national cohort of three- and four-year-olds.[2] As already discussed, naionrai also emphasise the total development of the child, while using Irish as the medium for communication. Children are not formally taught the language, but learn it informally through its contextualised use in play situations.

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[1] European Commission Childcare Network (1996:71) notes that in the Republic of Ireland in 1993 'there were approximately 2,920 children [aged under three years] whose fees were subsidised by local authorities, 2% of the age group'. Only 30% of these children attended nurseries on a full-day basis, and the rest attended community playgroups on a part-time basis. Among children aged three- to six-years there were about 5,830 whose fees in day-care centres were subsidised by public authorities, and 80% of these children attended community playgroups on a part-time basis.

[2] Based on the population estimate used in the Statistical Report of the Department of Education (1994) that there were 52,143 children aged 3 years and 54,353 aged 4 years on Jan 1 1993.

Montessori playgroups also operate on an independent basis, and Glasgow (1992) noted that there were about 200 Montessori nursery schools or kindergartens in the Republic in 1992, the majority in the Dublin area, with an estimated 2,000 children attending. The Montessori Method exposes the child to a carefully planned environment which provides material and experiences which promote the development of cognitive and physical skills.

Taken together, these figures suggest that upwards of 30,000 children participated in some form of pre-schooling in 1993. While exact calculations are not possible, this represents up to about 40% of the population of pre-school children aged three to four years. Yet, according to the OECD report on education (1995) only 1.3% of three-year-olds in Ireland receive state-provided pre-school education, while the remainder are in the care of parents, voluntary organisations or private groups. It is likely that there would be an even higher take-up of pre-school services if there were a greater degree of state subsidisation of the sector and if they were more accessible to rural children.

Parents who choose to send their children to a pre-school are likely to opt to send them to school before the compulsory starting age of six years. In the school year 1992-93, 56% of all four-year-olds began school at the earliest possible age, while 99.7% of all five-year- olds attended primary school (Department of Education, 1994). Thus, in the OECD's overall international comparisons of places in publicly funded child-care services from age three to the compulsory school-start age (six years in Ireland), Ireland is seen to cater for about 55% of this age-group (OECD 1995), a higher proportion than in the UK or Portugal, but this is almost entirely accounted for by parents opting to send their children to school well before the compulsory starting age.

It appears that the demand for services before the compulsory school starting age of six years is growing. This may be due in part to social changes such as the rise in the number of lone parent families as well as the number of families in which both parents are working outside the home. Hennessy and Hayes (1994) surveyed a sample of 1,820 parents of five-year-olds and got responses from 1,067 (59%). They found that up to 76% of parents reported that their children had experienced non-parental pre-school care at some time before the age of four, and this ranged from short sessions for a limited interval in a home setting, through pre-school for several hours a day, to full time day-care in a crèche or nursery. Over half those parents reported that their children had spent some time in a voluntary playgroup.

The high participation rates in voluntary pre-schools and in the early non-compulsory years of primary school should not be interpreted merely as a take-up of 'baby-sitting' service. Goutard (1980) argues that many parents choose pre-schooling on the basis of the need to prepare children for primary school. Parents are also aware of the need for young children to socialise together, and to learn to function happily in a group, an experience which is less available in today's smaller families. Parents' reasons for enrolling their child in a pre-school programme may include the belief that it will be academically advantageous to the child when he or she enters the formal school system, or will assist the child's social and emotional development, or will compensate for shortcomings within the family, as well as a desire to place the child in a safe and stimulating environment while they are engaged in work or other activities. Some parents, who see the enormous learning ability of their babies and toddlers in developing physical and cognitive skills and in acquiring language, may be aware that the child could gain significantly from the additional stimulation provided by a pre-school environment.

Despite the high take-up of pre-school education and the growing demand for improved provision, early education in Ireland has been largely unregulated, with the exception of the junior and senior infant classes in primary schools, the recently introduced Early Start programme, and the provisions for traveller children and the Rutland St. project. The sections of the Child Care Act 1991 (Part VII) dealing with supervision of pre-school services have been implemented since the end of 1996, and they provide at least some legislative control of this sector. Persons carrying on pre-school services (defined as 'any pre-school, playgroup, day nursery, crèche, day-care or other similar service...catering for children under six years of age who are not attending school') are now required to notify the local health board regarding that service. These regulations place a duty on health boards to inspect those services annually, to ensure the health, safety and welfare and to promote the development of pre-school children attending pre-school services. Providers of these services are now required to meet specific standards regarding premises, facilities, child-adult ratios, total number of children, safety and insurance. However, no regulations regarding the qualifications required to provide such services are included, apart from an assessment of the 'suitability' of the person providing the service. Hayes (1995:14) suggests that the lack of regulation in pre-school services up to now was based on the belief, enshrined in the Constitution, that the family has sole responsibility for children, without adaptation to the actual changes in societal norms and family structure which require greater input from the state in the shared care of children. She stressed the need to develop a co-ordinated and comprehensive national policy for the development of high-quality early educational services.

The Early Start programme is one indication of a more formal and regulated approach to early education and this may indicate a shift in policy by the Department of Education towards extending their brief to three-year-olds, specifically to disadvantaged three-year-olds. Such an extension would be supported by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) which, in its report on Early Childhood Education (1995:152) has called for provision for three- to four-year-old children to be established as an integral part of the primary school, with adequate staffing and funding, and with the extension of the current infant programme to three years. The INTO states that all three-year-old children have the right to educational provision, though it should not be compulsory, and parents should still have a choice about the type of provision they select. Meanwhile, the Department of Health has also expressed itself as committed to the development of pre-school services in areas of social deprivation (Irish Times Education and Living Supplement, 25 April 1995), thus presenting an overlap in the responsibilities of two government departments, and variation in their response to those responsibilities, usually on the basis of location. The INTO (1995) report has called for the establishment of a Task Force, under the auspices of the Department of Education, representing all of the appropriate government departments, in order to develop a comprehensive policy on early childhood education and to ensure co-ordination in the delivery of services.

Despite the current overall lack of state provision or monitoring, pre-schooling in various guises has become a major force in Irish education, directly linked to the child-care needs and educational aspirations of parents, but a force which hitherto has operated for the most part outside the remit of the state (apart from the Rutland Street Pre-school Programme, the Early Start programme and the public subsidies provided to small numbers of children to attend community playgroups and day nurseries.). However, the activation of the Child Care Act is likely to lead to greater state involvement in this sector in the future, at least in upholding standards regarding safety, premises and facilities in pre-school services.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

As discussed above, parents may opt for pre-schooling for a variety of reasons. Some parents may have read media reports of international research on high-profile early intervention projects, such as 'Operation Headstart' in the US, which attracted debate because of its high levels of public funding. The funding of programmes such as Headstart in the U.S. and the Rutland Street project in Ireland point to the particular importance of the early years in intervening to combat the effects of socio-economic disadvantage on children's cognitive and social development. However, several early reports (e.g. Bronfenbrenner 1975, Austin 1976) found that the gains in IQ observed among children who attended such interventionist pre-schools faded within a few years of leaving the pre-school. Sylva (1993) interprets such findings as showing that the real benefits of early learning are to be seen not in terms of IQ increases, but in terms of 'life skills' and social and economic outcomes. When looking at effects broader than long-term IQ increases, the results from the Rutland St. Pre-school (Kelleghan 1977, Holland 1979) showed that the children who attended were significantly more likely to continue their education to Group or Intermediate Certificate level than their inner-city peers who did not attend. Similarly in the US, research by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation (Lazar *et al.* 1982; Lewis 1993) showed that the effects of high quality pre-schooling extend well into adulthood, with higher academic achievement, less delinquency, and less take- up of welfare by adults who had participated in Headstart.

Daniels (1995) found that the effects of pre-schooling were evident in a follow-up study of seven-year-olds in Britain. She found that children who had attended nursery school or playgroup had significantly higher National Curriculum test results in English reading, writing, Mathematics and Science, than had non-attenders. Similarly, Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart (1993) found that those who attended a high-quality pre-school had higher achievement scores at age 14 and higher literacy scores at age 19 than non-attenders, and were more likely to graduate from high school. Other positive outcomes for pre-schooling have been found in, for example, Britain (Osborn and Milbank 1987, Blackburne 1992), Australia (de Lacy and Ronan 1986), Bermuda (McCartney, Scarr, Phillips, Grajek and Schwarz 1982) and the US (Schweinhart, Weikart and Larner, 1986; Lazar, Darlington, Murray and Snipper, 1982).

Overall, it appears that public funding for intervention pre-schooling for disadvantaged children is repaid by savings in welfare and custodial expenses. It has been estimated that high-quality pre-school programmes return a later saving of $7 (Lewis, 1993, Schweinhart, Barnes and Weikart, 1993) for every dollar invested in them, with lower delinquency figures and longer attendance at school reducing the need for later costly state intervention. Rutter (1985) interprets the evidence of long-term benefits of pre-schooling as arising from improvements in children's self-esteem, orientation to the task, and attitudes to learning, rather than from what the children are specifically taught.

Research on the efficacy of pre-school intervention programmes stresses that they cannot be seen as 'one-shot' remedies, but that their core features of a developmental curriculum and good parental involvement should also be intrinsic parts of the elementary school system. Unless such continuity and extra resources are provided to disadvantaged children, it would appear unreasonable to expect a short-term educational experience to fully counteract the many social and educational disadvantages experienced by at-risk groups before they reach adulthood. Also, it is worth remembering, as Tizard (1980) points out, that pre-schooling should not have to justify itself in terms of educational gain alone, but instead should be viewed as serving the whole spectrum of children's emotional, physical, social and psychological development. Hayes (1995) stresses that the first principle in early education is that 'children are important in their own right'. Thus, she argues, services provided for them should not have to justify their existence by repaying society or facilitating social change, but should be assessed in terms of their effects on children. From this perspective, early education is viewed as one of the rights of children to have experiences that help them to develop to their full potential.

1.4.1 Quality in Pre-schooling

Research studies showing positive effects of pre-schooling all stress that the pre-school must be of high quality. Any study of pre-school provision must therefore focus on the quality of the experience provided. There have been various attempts to define a high quality pre-school. Farquhar (1990) argued that an attempt to evaluate quality must take account of the differing perspectives of all of the 'users' of the service, including children, parents, staff, social services and government, as well as the different premises which underlie pre-schooling, such as theories of child development, the need for comprehensiveness of social service provision, value for money for the State, and the culture served. Lewis (1993) defined high-quality pre-school programmes as follows:

> As far as High/Scope researchers are concerned, a high-quality pre-school program is developmentally appropriate and has a curriculum that allows children to take charge of their own learning. Teachers are well-trained and work under knowledgeable supervision, parents are meaningfully involved and the program is well-administered and evaluated. Ideally, the ratio of students should be no higher than 10 to 1.
>
> Lewis (1993:748)

Rumbold (1990) reported on the committee of inquiry into the quality of educational experience offered to three- and four-year-old children in Britain and concluded that high quality pre-schooling must involve:

- a central role for play and talk
- regular evaluation and review of the curriculum
- small groups and a low pupil-teacher ratio
- highly skilled staff
- participation by parents as active partners in the child's education.

Pugh (1992) would add to the above:

- clearly defined aims and objectives
- effective management
- an atmosphere in which children and adults feel secure and valued
- an appropriate curriculum for physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development
- a system of record-keeping to monitor children's learning, shared with parents.

It is pre-schooling of high quality which has usually been shown to have positive effects on children's development. Sylva and Moss (1992) and Jowett and Sylva (1986) report on a comparison of 90 children, half of whom had attended well-resourced high-quality nurseries and half who had attended poorly resourced playgroups managed by parents. They found significant differences between the groups in their first year in primary school, with the children who had experienced high-quality pre-schooling showing higher motivation and perseverance than the other group. Similarly, Nabuco and Sylva (1995) found different outcomes for different types of pre-school experience, with an association between attendance at a High/Scope programme and later success at reading and writing in primary school; while attendance at a Formal Skills programme, with adult-led instruction in literacy and mathematics showed a negative association with reading and a very negative association with children's later self-assessment of their competence and popularity. Nabuco and Sylva concluded that the High/Scope curriculum provided pre-schooling of a higher quality than either of the two other models they studied, the Formal Skills, or the free-play *Movimento da Escola Moderna*. Jowett and Sylva (1986) argue that the ideal would be a network of diverse provision of high quality pre-schooling to meet diverse needs. The naionrai represent one such need, for immersion pre-schooling, and the aim is that the service provided should be of the highest quality possible.

1.5 IMMERSION EDUCATION AND PRE-SCHOOLING

Many countries offer children the opportunity to attend pre-schools where the language used differs from their mother-tongue and there is an extensive research literature on the subject of such early immersion in pre-school. Spolsky (1989) observes that there are two basic, but often competing principles which must be taken into account when policies for language and education are being formulated.

> The first concerns the rights of individual members of a society to equality of educational opportunity; the second concerns the rights of individuals and groups in a multilingual community to maintain, if they so choose, their linguistic varieties.
>
> Spolsky (1989:92)

As outlined by Spolsky, the principle of equality of educational opportunity entails both the right to be educated in the variety of language which was learned in the home, as far as is feasible, and, in addition, the right to learn the standard or official language of the community. The second principle concerns the right of an individual or group to do whatever is possible to support a language which has important ethnic, cultural or religious value for them.

Where these principles compete, individuals may choose to assign priority to one over the other at one stage, and possibly reverse this order at another. Spolsky argues that bilingual education such as the Canadian immersion system can be viewed as the application of both these principles in a multilingual setting, with priority given initially to instruction through the minority language/second language, but with support for the child's mother tongue later in the school system.

The first deliberate educational experiment in immersion took place in September 1965, in the kindergarten class of a St. Lambert school in Montreal, Quebec. Immersion education refers to the use of children's non-native language as a medium of instruction. It differs from 'submersion' in which immigrant children or children with a low-status language are forced to accept academic instruction through the medium of their second language (L2), often with other children who are native speakers of that language, where the teacher does not understand these children's native language (L1), and without receiving any support L2 classes (Skuttnabb-Kangas 1988:40). In such a situation these children are submerged in their new language, while their L1 is threatened by lack of support on a wider social basis.

In immersion education programmes such as the naíonraí and all-Irish school system in Ireland, the first language of the majority (English) is supported at community and society level, while the language of the school (Irish) is added to the child's linguistic repertoire. For the minority who are L1 speakers of Irish, the naíonra or Irish-medium school provides formal support and enrichment for this minority language which is otherwise not well-served in terms of its use in the media or the wider Irish community, while the L2 English language skills learned are supported by other children whose L1 is English and by the wider community in Ireland, as well as extensively in the media.

Artigal (1991) summed up the research literature which has tried to identify which factors contribute to a beneficial outcome from an immersion programme. He points to three main variables

1. The social status of the home language and culture.
2. The attitudes of the pupils towards the school language and their reasons for learning it.
3. The pedagogical approach used to teach the new language.

Swain (1981) showed that children are more likely to be successful in immersion if their home language and culture is that of a strong social majority, as for example, English speakers in Canada attending French immersion. Regarding attitudes to the new language, Artigal concluded that it is essential that an immersion programme is not imposed, either on a society in general, or on individual children, nor must the child's own language be explicitly or implicitly rejected. The third variable, pedagogical approach, Artigal sums up by saying that mutual communicability between teachers and pupils from day one is of critical importance.

Genesee (1984, 1987) reviewed the research on immersion programmes in Canada, and concluded that immersion students show the same or better academic achievement as children in non-immersion situations, and acquire normal English proficiency, in addition to attaining a high level of fluency in French, their L2. Cummins (1988) and Cummins and Swain (1986) used the interdependence principle to explain the lack of a negative effect on immersion children's first-language skills in an additive-bilingual setting. Cummins claimed that 'cognitive academic language proficiency' (CALP) is common across languages, so that experience with either language in such a setting promotes development of CALP in both languages.

Ellis (1994:225) outlined the different types of immersion programme:

- early immersion (from kindergarten), or
- late immersion (for example, from Grades 4 or 7 in the Canadian system), and
- full immersion (all instruction in the L2) or
- partial immersion (some subjects only taught through the L2).

Genesee's summary of the immersion research indicates that, on balance, total immersion produces better results than partial immersion, and early immersion produces better results than late. The effects of early immersion in particular are explored in more detail in Section 1.5.1.

1.5.1 Effects of Early Immersion

There have been numerous studies of the effects of early immersion on children's cognitive, academic and linguistic development and only a selection of this research is offered here. Results from evaluations of some long-running programmes such as those in Canada (Swain and Lapkin 1982; and Genesee 1984, 1987) show many favourable effects. Such children who go on to attend immersion elementary and secondary schools attain high levels of proficiency in their L2, attain normal L1 proficiency and show the same or better levels of academic development as those of their peers educated in non-immersion schools.

Comblain and Rondal (1993) studied a group of four- to five-year-old children in an early immersion setting in France, where English was the language of instruction, and contrasted them with monolingual peers. Results showed that the immersion group had improved English-speaking skills, and their French skills were not adversely affected compared to controls. Bamford and Mizokawa (1991) found that children in a Spanish immersion class had superior non-verbal problem solving to their non-immersed controls.

Bialystok (1986) demonstrated that children in Grade 1 of a French immersion programme had bettter cognitive control, an aspect of metalinguistic ability, than their monolingual peers. Göncz and Kodzolpeljic (1991) also found that children in pre-school immersion programmes had better metalinguistic awareness and linguistic analysis skills than a control group of monolinguals. The immersion children were more aware of the arbitrary link between an object and its name, and more proficient at breaking words in syllables and phonemes. The researchers also showed that the children who had experience of a bilingual immersion programme had better concentration, and more developed skills in synthesis and abstraction, necessary for reading. They interpreted their findings as indicating that bilingual experience promotes a more analytic approach to language.

Neufeld (1993) examined two groups of university students in Ottawa, one of which had attended an early French immersion programme. He found that early immersion produced no immediate or long-range adverse effects, and interpreted his findings as indicating the linguistic and cognitive benefits of learning another language early in school.

Thus, the weight of research evidence points to the positive effects of early immersion for majority language children whose first language is not at risk, with resulting normal or superior general academic achievement, normal first language skills and advanced second language skills. In addition, a range of social effects relating to more open cultural attitudes and tolerance, and cognitive effects such as enhanced divergent thinking have been found. There are also significant social effects resulting from the establishment of early immersion programmes. For example, early immersion in Israel, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales has played an important role in assisting the language revitalisation movements in those countries, and in boosting, or in some cases, creating, the demand for the provision of primary school immersion programmes. This appears to hold true of Ireland and Northern Ireland also, where demand for all-Irish primary schools in some instances has grown from parents who are happy with their child's experience of a naíonra and wish to continue with immersion (see Ní Mhaoláin 1995 and Maguire 1991).

1.5.2 Immersion Education and Lesser-Used Languages

The experience of immersion can be found all over the world, reflecting the provision made by many countries to promote bi- or multi-lingualism. Examples of early immersion beginning at kindergarten level can be found in a number of other countries such as the Basque country, Catalonia, Finland, Israel, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, as well as in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. Ó Murchú (1987) gave a comprehensive overview of the provision of pre-schooling through 29 lesser used languages throughout Europe, (in the Netherlands, France, UK, Italy, Luxembourg, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Spain and the Republic of Ireland). In the case of minority languages such as these, immersion pre-schooling has grown up because of the desire of parents to expose children to a minority or heritage language which may be either the children's mother-tongue or their second language. The naíonraí operate as early immersion for the majority of children, who come from English-speaking homes, but they also provide mother-tongue pre-primary education for a minority, both in and outside of the Gaeltacht, for whom Irish is the home language. Van der Goot, Renkema and Stuijt (1994) have detailed the provision of pre-schooling in some of the lesser-used languages in Europe and shown the interest and growth in the last twenty years in particular. Some details of the provision of early immersion in two lesser-used language communities are given below.

Catalan in Catalonia

Montané (1994) and Artigal (1991) have detailed the situation regarding early Catalan immersion in Catalonia. Catalan is spoken by approximately 7 million people, and is the largest stateless language in Europe. The status of Catalan remained high (despite territorial division and its prohibition as an official language since 1714) until about 50 years ago, when the Franco regime brutally repressed all signs of Catalan identity, especially the language. In addition, there was massive migration from Castilian-speaking areas into Catalan regions. The new Spanish democratic Constitution of 1978 and later regional Statutes began the era of Catalan restoration, which still continues. The Catalan government now seeks a 'normalization' of the Catalan language, that is, they wish it to be the normal, dominant language within Catalonia, even if a minority language in Spain.

Catalan immersion programmes were first legally offered to Spanish-speaking children as recently as 1983, though some covert programmes existed since 1978. Pre-primary education before age five is optional, and thus is not publicly funded. However, when kindergarten or *parvulari* classes for three-, four- and five-year-olds are located in state schools they are subsidised. Pre-primary teachers, like primary teachers, must have a teaching qualification from a three-year university course. Classes tend to run from 9.00-12.00 and from 3.00-5.00 p.m., and during the break children may either stay in school for lunch and a rest, or go home.

All pre-primary education in Catalonia must now be bilingual Catalan/Spanish, with at least one subject taught in Catalan, though the remainder may also be taught through Catalan, depending on teachers' competence and parents' wishes. This, in conjunction with the fact that children who are mother-tongue speakers of Catalan have a legal right to receive their first education through Catalan, has necessitated an on-going need for teacher re-training. There also exists a Department of Education Programme of Linguistic Immersion (PIL), according to which a proportion of *parvulari* operate full Catalan immersion.

By 1984, Ó Murchú (1987) reports that a majority of public schools were Catalan medium, and she claims that this was made possible largely through the work of Catalan-medium pre-schools. Research indicates that children, especially Castilian speakers, show better progress in the language following its use as medium of instruction in pre-school and school. Difficulties remain regarding the large number of Castilian-only speakers and the short supply of Catalan teachers, but as Artigal points out:

> The [Catalan] immersion programme, in short, seems here and now to be psycholinguistically appropriate, sociolinguistically opportune and relatively viable in legal terms as a tool for normalization of the Catalan language. It remains, however, to make it generally available, in a full developed form, to all those children who have already chosen it or who will do so in the future.
>
> Artigal (1991:87)

Fishman (1991) concludes that, while the position of Catalan remains 'delicate' in terms of reversing language shift, there has been considerable progress. He cites the 1986 Census figures showing that 60% of the adult population and 64% of children claimed to be able to 'speak Catalan'. Over 55% of adults reported that they use Catalan daily. Fishman claims (1991:ix) that Catalan in Spain can be viewed as one of the 'three success stories (more or less)' of reversing language shift, which also include Modern Hebrew in Israel and French in Quebec.

Maori in New Zealand

Benton (1984) reported that only a few communities remained in New Zealand by the early 1980s in which children acquired the Maori language as their mother tongue. The primary schools taught only through the medium of English, and this, combined with social changes such as migration to the cities (further emphasising the importance of English) and the high levels of unemployment among Maoris, served to undermine the traditional villages and bring about a situation of near language death. However, there was a resurgence of support for the language and culture of the Maoris in the late 1970s and early 1980s, facilitated, according to Spolsky (1989) by *pakeha* (European) guilt at bringing about near cultural genocide.

Initial attempts to revive Maori through the school system foundered because of the overwhelming influence of English on school-age children, so an early focus was on the teaching of Maori to younger, pre-school, children. Maori-medium pre-school groups, called *kohanga reos* (language nests) were proposed, led by older, fluent Maoris. The first such groups were established in 1982, with some financial support from the Department of Maori Affairs, but with the burden of organisation resting on local communities who desired to participate. There was extraordinary growth of these groups, from the first four experimental *kohanga reos* in 1982, to over 280 in 1984, and about 520 by 1988, with about 8,000 children participating (Fishman 1991:238). Funding help comes from the Department of Maori Affairs through an independent trust, but organisation and control remains in the hands of the local community. Fishman notes that in 1989 the Department of Maori Affairs allocated about US$12m to 520 *kohanga reos*, or about US$23,000 per group per year. Usually two *kaiawhi* ('embracers') are paid salaries, and Maori-speaking grandparents and parents also act as volunteers. Children attend for four to eight hours per day.

These Maori-immersion playgroups have had a significant success, according to Spolsky:

> The effect of the *kohanga reos* cannot be exaggerated; where six years ago a bare handful of children came to primary school with any knowledge of the Maori language, now each year between two and three thousand children, many of them fluent bilinguals, start school after having been exposed to daily use of the Maori language for three or more years.
>
> Spolsky (1989:91)

Maori has been declared an official language of New Zealand, and a Maori Language Commission has been set up. Children graduating from *kohanga reos* have produced pressure to provide Maori-medium primary schooling, which often begins by a local school making a room available for one Maori-immersion group. Spolsky asserts that continued parental support for the *kohanga reos* will increase the pressure on the school system to make provision for bilingual education.

Overall, Spolsky concludes that Maori now shows good prospects for revitalisation. However, Fishman (1991) is less optimistic, and claims that the *kohanga reos* have not significantly changed language use in the home. He argues that without such home use, and in the absence of widespread all-Maori schooling at elementary and secondary levels, TV programming and print-media, the future of Maori is not yet secure. Fishman concludes that the initial successes of the *kohanga reos* must be built upon, primarily in the targeting of family, neighbourhood and community use, through young-adult focused operation and through the promotion of Maori literacy and a more widespread all-Maori school network, instead of what he views as an over-reliance on the assumption that the language will be revived when the *kohanga reos* graduates themselves have Maori mother-tongue children.

This discussion of the role of early immersion in two other minority language situations presents some interesting parallels as well as differences from the Irish situation. Each situation represents a different phase in the process of language revitalisation. The role of parents in demanding and supporting early immersion programmes in each of these minority languages is seen to be critical in the three countries, with consequent parental demand later for immersion primary education. The need for generous state funding and legislation for bilingual or immersion programmes is highlighted by the Catalonian and Maori experience. Finally, the need to situate early immersion in the context of a much wider and well-resourced language revitalisation movement is highlighted. Just as the long-term expectations for pre-school intervention programmes for disadvantaged children must be realistic, in accepting that such programmes can help significantly but cannot by themselves overcome all of the problems besetting such children, so too early immersion programmes cannot be expected single-handedly to revitalise minority languages, though they may make significant contributions to the revitalisation of the language.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sets out to describe the experience of a sample of children in early Irish immersion, that is, in the naíonraí, not only in terms of their language outcome, but in terms of the effects of their community and family characteristics on their linguistic success, as well as the effects of this experience on their parents, homes and communities. The research questions addressed are:

- How much Irish do children learn in the naíonra?
- What are the major child-, home- and naíonra-level factors which impact on their progress in Irish?
- What are the skills and requirements of those leading naíonraí, the Stiúrthóirí?
- What is the profile of parents who choose to send their children to a naíonra?
- How do parents perceive the impact of the naíonra in their homes and what are their needs?

The method of data collection employed to address these questions in outlined in Chapter 2. Chapters 3 and 4 examine home-level variables and present the results of the survey of the parents. Chapter 5 focuses on the naíonra-level variables and presents the results of the survey of the Stiúrthóirí. Chapter 6 outlines the tests developed for the children and gives their overall results, while Chapter 7 presents examines the effects of a range of variables on the children's Irish test scores. Chapter 8 summarises these findings.

1.7 CONCLUSION

The move to provide Irish-medium pre-schooling is one aspect of the movement to revitalise Irish, operating in conjunction with the high level of interest in pre-school education in Ireland. The benefits of pre-school education have been attested by research in a number of countries, particularly in disadvantaged groups. The level of participation in pre-school education in Ireland points to the need to monitor standards in this area to ensure that pre-primary provision is of high quality.

The success of immersion programmes internationally underlies and supports the parent-led demand for Irish-medium pre-schooling. International research findings indicate that a positive environment exists here for successful early immersion in the naíonra, with societal support for the majority home language (English), an optional immersion system which ensures high motivation and positive attitudes from those involved, and a pedagogical approach which stresses the need to provide the child with comprehensible input and encourage all efforts at communication in Irish. The discussion of lesser-used languages highlights Irish speakers' need to avail of Irish-medium education for their children in order to support their minority mother-tongue within a bilingual society. Overall, the naíonraí need to be situated, not only within the state-supported Irish revitalisation movement, but also within a better-resourced pre-school sector.

Chapter 2

The Scope of the Study

2.1 INTRODUCTION

To study the naíonra experience in all its aspects, it was necessary to assemble information on each group of participants. Therefore, data were gathered from children, parents, Stiúrthóirí (Leaders), Comhstiúrthóirí/Stiúrthóirí Cúnta (Co-Leaders/Assistant Leaders), and Comhairleoirí (Advisors). This chapter sets out an overview of the information collected. Section 2.2 details the information from a naíonra Census in February 1993, and Section 2.3 outlines the scope of the project.

2.2 CENSUS

In order to establish a sampling frame for naíonra sessions and the children attending naíonraí, it was decided to begin the project by conducting a Census of all children in naíonraí in the Republic of Ireland in February 1993. The Census established the number of naíonra sessions organised by each Stiúrthóir, the number of children in each session, their sex and date of birth. A subsequent form, assigning a numerical identification number to each child, asked Stiúrthóirí about the home language of each child, and his or her ability in Irish at the time of data collection. Stiúrthóirí were also asked to indicate what school the child would progress to, if this was known. These data are presented in this chapter.

2.2.1 Total Naíonraí and their Distribution

The naíonra Census in February 1993 showed that there were 190[1] naíonra sessions in the Republic of Ireland, with approximately 2,600 children attending. These sessions were run by 174 Stiúrthóirí (of whom there were 16 running a second session on the same premises[1]. The response rate to the Census was 96%. In what follows, the 182 naíonra sessions for which Census forms were returned are described and referred to as the Census naíonraí. A total of 2,487 children attended these naíonraí, 1,862 in English-speaking districts (Galltachtaí) and 625 in Irish-speaking districts (Gaeltachtaí).

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[1] This number differs from the total calculated by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta for 1993 because An Comhchoiste, for administrative purposes, counts as double sessions those which have more than a certain number of children. In this study, a session is defined as a group of children attending a naíonra at a particular time, regardless of the number in the group.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the distribution of the total 190 naíonraí sessions in February 1993. The highest concentration of naíonraí is in the urban area of Dublin, Co. Dublin and neighbouring counties. Naíonraí are also quite strongly represented in rural districts which are Irish-speaking (Gaeltachtaí), particularly in the south-western, western and north-western coastal areas.[2] In other rural areas they tend to be quite dispersed, and some counties, such as Cavan, Leitrim, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo and Wexford had no naíonraí in 1993.

Table 2.1 shows the overall distribution of naíonra sessions in English-speaking (Galltacht) and Irish-speaking (Gaeltacht) districts from the Census data.

Table 2.1 Numbers of naíonraí in Galltacht (English-speaking) and Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking) areas - Naíonra Census data

Distribution of Sessions in Naíonra Census	*Galltacht*	*Gaeltacht*	*Total*
Number of single sessions in Census	106	46	152
Naíonraí with a second session (same Stiúrthóir)	13	2	15
Total number of sessions in Census	132	50	182
Total number of children in Census	1862	625	2487
Mean number of children per session	14.1	12.5	13.7

About a quarter of children were in Gaeltacht naíonraí, three-quarters in Galltacht naíonraí. Gaeltacht naíonraí were somewhat smaller on average than Galltacht ones, with an average number of 12.5 children compared to 14.1.

2.2.2 Numbers of Children per Session

The size distribution of naíonra sessions is reported in Table 2.2. Most (63%) sessions in Galltacht areas had up to 15 children, and 37% had 16 or more. Gaeltacht sessions tended to be smaller, with a majority (58%) having up to 10 children and most of the remainder having between 16 and 20 children.

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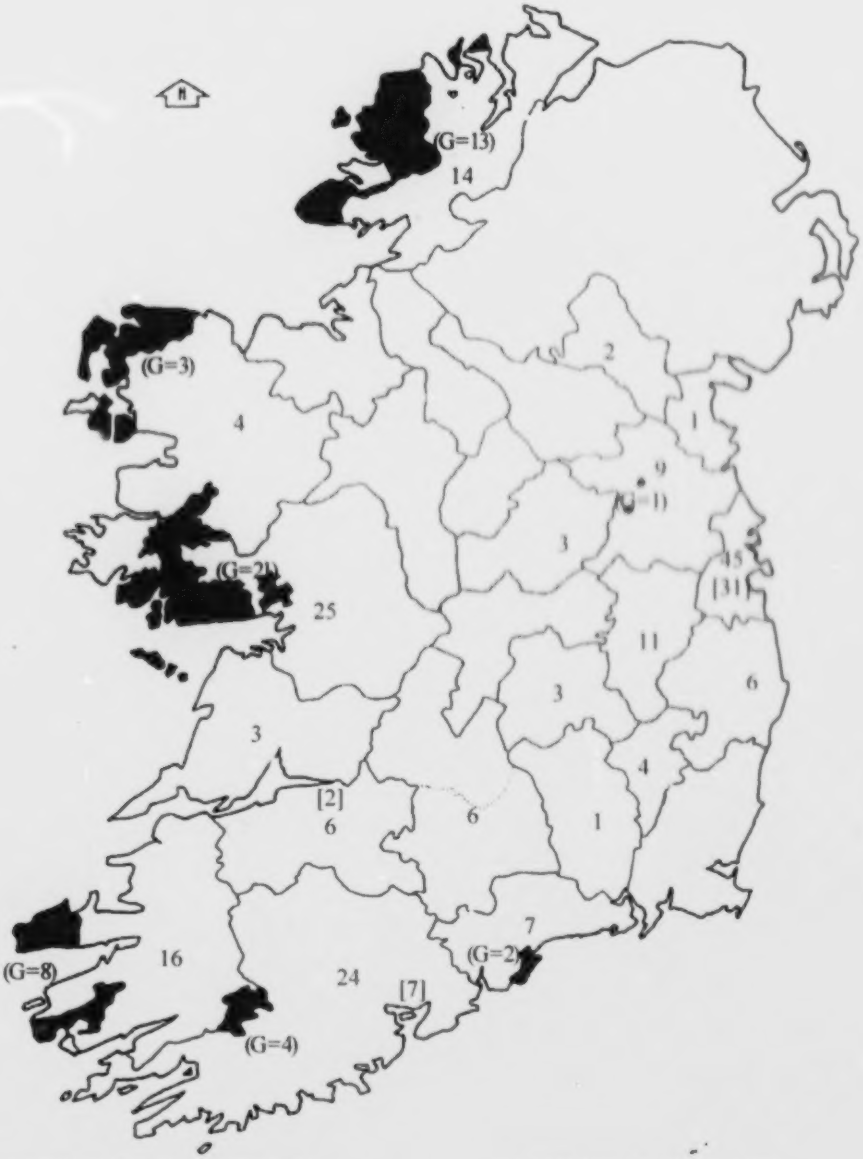
[1] A double session is defined here as the provision of a naíonra for another group of children at a different time to the first group, but run by the same Stiúrthóir and in the same premises.

[2] Numbers for Gaeltacht sessions are given as 'G' in Fig. 2.1 and are included in the county total.

Fig. 2.1 Distribution of naíonra sessions in the Republic of Ireland 1993


N
(G=13)
14
(G=3)
4
2
1
9
(G=1)
3
15
[31]
(G=21)
25
11
6
3
3
[2]
6
6
4
1
7
(G=2)
16
(G=8)
24
[7]
(G=4)

Source: Naíonra Census, February 1993

Total Naionraí Sessions = 190
Galltacht: 138
Gaeltacht: 52

Note: 'G 'indicates Gaeltacht sessions; boxed numbers indicate city sessions; both sub-categories are included in the county total.

Table 2.2 Distribution of naíonra sessions by number of children per session

Number of children per session[1]	Proportion of Sessions Galltacht N=132 %	 Gaeltacht N=50 %	 Total N=182 %
up to 5	6.8	6.0	6.6
6 to 10	30.3	52.0	36.3
11 to 15	25.8	8.0	20.9
16 to 20	21.2	32.0	24.2
21 to 25	12.1	0.0	8.8
26 to 30	2.3	2.0	2.2
over 30	1.5	0.0	1.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Numbers here and in other tables do not always sum to 100%, due to rounding.

2.2.3 Pupil-Teacher Ratios

About half of all naíonra sessions are run by a Stiúrthóir with the assistance of a Comh-Stiúrthóir/Stiúrthóir Cúnta. It is therefore important to look at the pupil-teacher ratio for the children in the Census, reported in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Pupil-teacher ratio per session	Galltacht N=132 %	Gaeltacht N=50 %	Total N=182 %
up to 5	11.4	14.0	12.1
over 5 up to 10	58.3	84.0	65.4
over 10 up to 15	28.8	2.0	21.4
over 15 up to 20	1.5	0.0	1.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0

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[1] Note that the number of children does not equal the pupil-teacher ratio, since it does not take into account the presence of an assistant.

Most sessions (70%) in English-speaking districts have pupil-teacher ratios which are equal to, or less than 10[1]. However, another 29% of Galltacht naíonraí had ratios of between 10.1 and 15 children per adult, and the remainder (1.5%) were even larger, with ratios of between 15.1 and 20 children per adult. Ratios were significantly lower in Gaeltacht areas, with 98% of these sessions having ratios up to or including 10 children per adult. It is relevant to note here that Gaeltacht naíonraí receive a subsidy from Údarás na Gaeltachta, which requires them to maintain these low pupil-teacher ratios.

2.2.4 Sex

The Census information supplied by Stiúrthóirí showed that 50.7% of children attending were boys, 49.3% girls, with very similar figures for both Gaeltacht and Galltacht areas.

2.2.5 Age Distribution of the Children

Table 2.4 presents the age distribution of the children from the Census.

Table 2.4 Children's age distribution

Children's ages in years	*Galltacht N=1817 %*	*Gaeltacht N=607 %*	*Total N=2424 %*
less than 2.5	0.4	1.0	0.6
2.5 up to 3	1.8	6.2	3.0
3 up to 3.5	10.8	11.0	10.8
3.5 up to 4	29.4	29.9	29.5
4 up to 4.5	35.8	32.6	35.0
4.5 up to 5	19.8	16.8	19.0
5 or more	2.0	2.4	2.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean age	4.1	4.0	4.1

This calculation was carried out in April 1993, by which time the majority of children (85%) were at least 3.5 years of age. The small numbers of very young children may be the children of Stiúrthóirí, or they may have been accepted because of low numbers of children in particular naíonraí in rural areas. Naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas had a higher proportion of younger children up to three years (7.2%) compared to the Galltacht (2.2%). Otherwise their age distributions were similar. The mean age of the children reported on in the Naíonra Census was 4.1 years in April 1993. The children in English-speaking areas were on average about one month older than those in the Gaeltacht naíonraí.

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[1] The group insurance scheme operated specifies a ratio of no more than 10 children per adult. In 1993 exceptions were made in naíonraí where there was another adult on the premises who was available in case of emergency. From 1995 these exceptions are not made and no naíonra can have a ratio of more than 10 children per adult.

2.2.6 Numbers in Second Year in Naíonra

81% of the children overall were reported to be in their first year in the naíonra, and 19% in their second year. The proportions were roughly similar in Galltacht and Gaeltacht areas. The slightly higher proportion in their second year in the Gaeltacht (21% as against 18% in the Galltacht) is probably due to the somewhat larger numbers of very young children attending naíonraí there.

2.2.7 Children's Home Language and Ability in Irish

The Stiúrthóirí were asked to indicate what language(s), to the best of their knowledge, were spoken in each child's home. Table 2.5 shows the distribution of these results for Galltacht and Gaeltacht residents.

Table 2.5 Children's home language (Stiúrthóir report)

Home language(s)	*Galltacht N=1617 %*	*Gaeltacht N=607 %*	*Total N=2224 %*
English only	84.0	43.5	73.0
Irish and English	14.7	33.8	19.9
Irish only	1.2	22.6	7.0
Other language(s)	0.1	0.2	0.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Thus, Stiúrthóirí judged that only about 1% of children in Galltacht naíonraí and 23% in Gaeltacht naíonraí come from homes where only Irish is spoken. Another 15% and 34%, respectively, in English- and Irish-speaking areas are judged to come from bilingual homes. Stiúrthóir judgement on this issue is important since the language mix in a naíonra requires different strategies on the part of Stiúrthóirí. However, the children's home language will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, in relation to the parents' questionnaire.

Stiúrthóirí were also asked to assess each child's Irish competence before Easter 1993, when most children had spent at least two terms in the naíonra (and 19% had spent up to 5 terms there). The results are given in Table 2.6 again divided by Galltacht and Gaeltacht residence.

Table 2.6 Stiúrthóir assessment of children's Irish

Stiúrthóir rating of each child's Irish	*Galltacht N=1635 %*	*Gaeltacht N=606 %*	*Total N=2241 %*
Comprehension only	10.6	8.4	10.0
A few words	28.4	18.3	25.7
Some phrases	46.8	32.7	43.0
Good competence	13.1	19.6	14.9
Native speaker	1.0	21.0	6.4
	100.0	100.0	100.0

2.2.8 Plans for Primary Schooling

Stiúrthóirí were asked to report if they were aware of what type of primary school each child would attend. Table 2.7 presents the results.

Table 2.7 Plans for primary schools

Stiúrthóir report of parents' plans	*Galltacht N=1636 %*	*Gaeltacht N=596 %*	*Total N=2232 %*
All-Irish school	40.1	75.7	49.6
English-medium primary school	52.1	19.6	43.4
Not known	7.8	4.7	7.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0

About 76% of Gaeltacht children were expected by Stiúrthóirí to go on to an Irish-medium school. In the Galltacht, about 40% of naíonra children were expected to go on to an Irish-medium school (as against 3% of all children in the Galltacht attending such schools in 1993-1994[1]). Choice of primary school does not always rest entirely with the parents: some children may not be offered a place in the school of their parents' choice. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 4, but it is relevant to note here that a number of parents commented that they were aware that it is particularly difficult to get a place in all-Irish schools, and several indicated that they would be sending their child to an English-medium primary school because they had been told the list for their local all-Irish school was closed.

A rough estimate suggests that only about 40% of children in the reception classes of all-Irish schools in 1993 had attended a naíonra.[2] This may be due in part to lack of access to a naíonra or inability to secure a place in a local naíonra, as well as to parental choice regarding pre-schooling. Overall, the fact that over half of the children in Junior Infants' classes in all-Irish schools had not attended a naíonra points to the possibility that there is a demand for naíonraí which is not currently being met.

2.3 SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

Table 2.8 overleaf gives an overview of the information collected as the main part of this project. This involved questionnaires for all the adult participants in the naíonraí, that is parents, Stiúrthóirí, their assistants, and Comhairleoirí. In addition, the children's progress in the naíonraí was assessed by a test which was applied to a sub-sample of 225 children.

2.3.1 Children's Tests

Tests were conducted on a sample of 225 children from 25 naíonraí, drawn from the sampling frame provided by the Naíonra Census. The sample of naíonraí was stratified according to the areas allocated to the ten Comhairleoirí, with extra naíonraí being sampled from areas with a high density of naíonraí per Comhairleoir. Extra sessions were also drawn from Gaeltacht areas, to ensure adequate representation. Within each Comhairleoir's area, every naíonra had an equal probability of selection. Within each chosen naíonra every child had an equal probability of selection. When a naíonra was randomly sampled, 10 children from that naíonra's roll were, in turn, randomly selected, with two substitutes to allow for children missing through illness, etc., on the days of testing. When naíonraí with fewer than 10 children were selected, all of the children on their roll were tested.

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[1] Gaelscoileanna, personal communication.

[2] Department of Education statistics report that there were 56,172 children in Junior Infants in 1993/94, of whom approximately 55,000 were in the Galltacht. 3% of this total would give an estimate of about 1,600 in Junior Infants' classes in all-Irish schools in that year. The total number of children in Galltacht naíonra in that year was similar, at about 1,800, of whom 40% intended to choose an all-Irish school. On this basis it seems that only about 40% of Junior Infants in all-Irish schools would have attended a naíonra previously.

Table 2.8 Outline of the 'Early Immersion in the Naíonra' database

	N
Census • Total children in naíonraí, age, sex and home language	2,487
Children's tests • Irish Tests : comprehension, production and imitation • General cognitive development test, native language • Ratings by Stiúrthóir	225
Parents' questionnaire • Irish competence, educational standard, SES, age • Reasons for choosing naíonra, satisfaction, requirements • Involvement in naíonra activities, Irish language activities at home • Intentions regarding future all-Irish schooling	1,807
Questionnaire for Stiúrthóirí • Irish competence, experience, qualifications, in-service attendance • Language teaching methods, range of activities provided • Naíonra location, contact with parents, play-groups, schools • Requirements and suggestions	162
Questionnaire for Stiúrthóirí Cúnta/Comh-Stiúrthóirí • Irish competence, experience, qualifications, course attendance	79
Questionnaire for Comhairleoirí • Use of Irish by Stiúrthóirí, their interaction with children and parents • Language teaching methods, range of activities, and layout • Overall rating of naíonra	167

The sampled children were tested by the local Comhairleoir in an individual test of their comprehension and spoken Irish, and on a test of general cognitive development in their native language. Practical considerations made it necessary to have a number of testers, so it was decided to avail of the assistance of the Comhairleoirí to conduct these tests because of their long experience in dealing with children in the naíonraí, their familiarity to the children in their area through frequent visits to each naíonra, and the fact that the children were accustomed to hearing them speak only Irish.

The children in this sample were also assessed by their own Stiúrthóir according to certain criteria on social skills, independence, physical skills, language skills and second language learning skills. This was designed to give additional information which could not have been obtained from an objective test, given the constraints of time.

2.3.2 Parents' Questionnaire

After the Census was completed, each child was given a code number. A bilingual questionnaire was prepared for parents and distributed by each Stiúrthóir. Each questionnaire was identified by the child's first name and the first initial of their surname only (to ensure that each parent received the correct form) and the child's identification number to ensure confidentiality in test-processing and to allow matching with the child's test results as well as his/her Stiúrthóir's questionnaire and Comhairleoir's evaluation. The parents' questionnaire could be filled out in either Irish or English by either the child's mother or father, and it was returned by parents in a pre-paid envelope for processing by the research team. All coding and analysis was carried out by, or under the supervision of, the author.

Parents were surveyed regarding their satisfaction with the naíonra, their perception of the child's knowledge of Irish and general progress, their use of Irish in the home, their competence in Irish, their educational background and the type of national school they wanted for their child. A total of 2,487 parents were sampled, and 1,807 responded, a response rate of almost 73%. This response rate is high by general standards, and extremely high for a self-administered postal questionnaire. In large part this may be due to the commitment felt by parents to activities relating to their children, as well as to the parents' interest in the naíonraí.

2.3.3 Questionnaire for Stiúrthóirí

All of the 167 Stiúrthóirí who responded to the Census received a questionnaire, and 162 responded, representing a response rate of 97% of the Census return. Stiúrthóirí were surveyed regarding their experience, competence in Irish, qualifications, methods, recommendations for improvement of services to them and their attitudes to the involvement of parents and to contacts with schools, naíonraí and English-medium play groups in their area.

2.3.4 Questionnaire for Comh-Stiúrthóirí/Stiúrthóirí Cúnta

Stiúrthóirí with a Comhstiúrthóir/Stiúrthóir Cúnta (Co-Leader or Assistant leader) were given a form for their co-worker to fill out. This form was very brief, and focused on her

Irish ability, experience, qualifications, in-service attendance and requirements. Seventy-nine out of the total of 90 Stiúrthóirí Cúnta/Comh-Stiúrthóirí completed the form, a response rate of 88%.

2.3.5 Questionnaire for Comhairleoirí (Advisors)

There were ten regional Comhairleoirí (Advisors) in the Republic (and one in Northern Ireland) in 1993. Comhairleoirí visit existing naíonraí in their district on a regular basis, about once a month, and offer advice and support to Stiúrthóirí. In addition, they help with the founding of new naíonraí, and interview prospective Stiúrthóirí and Comh-Stiúrthóirí/Stiúrthóirí Cúnta. They inspect premises with a view to safety, the maximum number of children possible, and the suitability of furniture and equipment. Comhairleoirí also speak to parents at introductory meetings and organise in-service training courses in their area (about once a term).

Each Comhairleoir filled out an assessment on the naíonraí in her district, regarding, for example, the administration of the naíonra, its lay-out and resources, language use and special skills of individual Stiúrthóirí. These assessments were carried out only for the purposes of this research, and will not be used for any other purpose.

2.4 CONCLUSIONS

The Census of naíonraí in 1993 provides a summary of information about the background variables of children entering naíonraí, such as their age, sex and language background as judged by Stiúrthóirí, as well as an overview of the average pupil numbers and pupil-teacher ratios in operation. The plan of the project shows the response rate from each of the sectors involved in the naíonraí, and outlines the information collected from each. Many of the issues raised here, such as home language and naíonra size, will be discussed more fully in later chapters.

Chapter 3

The Profile of the Parents

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The education of young children is a partnership between their parents and teachers, as is noted by the High/Scope Approach to the National Curriculum in the UK (Brown 1990). The brief description of language revitalisation movements in Chapter 1 showed the importance of parents in initiating early immersion programmes, and in extending use of the target language outside of the pre-school. The Welsh Family Project (Brooke 1995, personal communication), which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, endeavours to make parents feel that they are active partners in the task of helping their children to acquire Welsh. In the present study it was considered essential to survey the parents of children in the naíonraí in order to ascertain some of the most relevant characteristics of this group, for example, their socio-economic status, ability in and use of Irish and their childhood experiences of the language. These and other factors are considered in this chapter. Section 3.2 gives a demographic profile of the respondents and their partners while Section 3.3 details their language background. Finally, parents' ability in Irish is examined in Section 3.4.

Questionnaires were distributed to the parents of 2,487 naíonraí children through the Supervisor of each naíonra. Each booklet contained an Irish and an English form of the questionnaire, and an explanatory covering letter in both languages requesting one of the child's parents to complete the form. Confidentiality was ensured by the use of codes rather than surnames on each form. Parents were reminded at regular intervals by Stiúrthóirí of the importance of returning the questionnaire, and Stiúrthóirí of naíonraí with low response rates were contacted and asked to remind parents again, but it was felt that any other intervention would be inappropriate. Eighteen hundred and seven (1,807) questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of almost 73%, which is particularly high for a self-administered postal questionnaire. The most likely explanation for this high response rate seems to be the level of interest and commitment felt by the parents of children in naíonraí.

Data on the home language of respondents and non-respondents are also available from a background sheet filled out by Stiúrthóirí for 90% of children in the naíonra Census of 1993. From this it can be concluded that the home language of non-respondents did not differ significantly from the profile for respondents to the questionnaire, as is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Comparison of non-respondents' home language with respondents (naíonra Census)

Home language(s)	*Respondents* *N=1689*[1] %	*Non-respondents* *N=535*[1] %
English only	72.5	74.4
Irish and English	20.2	18.7
Irish only	7.2	6.4
Other	0.0	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0

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1. Ns reduced because some background sheets not returned by Stiúrthóirí.

This comparison between respondents and non-respondents shows that, on the critical variable of home language, the surveyed parents were representative of the entire group of naíonra parents.

In what follows, we make a number of comparisons between the characteristics of naíonra parents and those of more general populations, some of which were designed to represent all parents of young children in the Republic of Ireland. In interpreting such comparisons it is important to bear in mind a key feature of the naíonra population. About a quarter of all naíonra parents are living in Gaeltacht areas, as against a much smaller proportion of all parents. For this reason, analyses distinguishing the characteristics of naíonra parents in Gaeltacht and Galltacht areas are of particular interest. Such analyses are provided for a number of key characteristics. It is important to note, with regard to the following analyses, that this survey of naíonra parents was not aimed at a random sample of adults, but instead it targeted the discrete population of parents with children attending a naíonra. As a result, it contains a higher proportion of Gaeltacht respondents than is found in national surveys, and is limited to the age-group of 20-50.

3.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND PARTNERS

3.2.1 Location

Overall, 24% of respondents reported that they lived in the Gaeltacht. The town/country distribution of respondents is presented in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Distribution of parents by location

Location	*N=1807* *%*
City	26
Town	26
Village	12
Country	36
Total	100

The relatively high representation of country respondents is mainly due to the fact that the majority of Gaeltacht respondents lived in the country or a village (91%), since the Gaeltacht is predominantly rural. In English-speaking areas the majority of naíonra parents lived in a city, town or village (75%).

3.2.2 Sex, Age and Marital Status

In 90% of cases the questionnaire was completed by the child's mother, and in 10% by the father. The majority of respondents (61%) were aged between 25 and 35 years, with a further 31% between 36 and 45 years. 7% were less than 25 years, and just 1% over 46. This age profile, of course, reflects the fact that these are the parents of young children, 40% of whom are discussing their first child in this questionnaire. Unlike other language-related surveys in Ireland, such as the ITÉ National Surveys of Languages in 1983 and 1993, which take random samples of the population and therefore have a wider age distribution, this survey began with a group which has, by definition, the narrower age base of the reproductive years.

93% of respondents to the parents' questionnaire stated that they were married or living with a partner, 5% were single parents, 2% were separated or divorced and 0.5% were widowed.

3.2.3 Labour Force and Occupational Status

The labour force status of mothers, who made up 90% of respondents, can be compared with that of the general population of mothers with at least one child aged 4 or less, as represented by the relevant sub-group of the ESRI Survey of Income Distribution, Population and Usage of State Services, 1987. (See Callan *et al.* 1989 for a description of the ESRI Survey).

There is a higher rate of economic activity among naíonra mothers than among mothers in the general population, with the former more than twice as likely to engage in paid

Table 3.3 Mothers' labour force status

	%	*% Naionra Mothers*		*% All Naionra*
	ESRI[1]	*Galltacht*	*Gaeltacht*	*Mothers*
Labour force status	*N=716*	*N=1178*	*N=386*	*N=1564*
At work: full time	23	24	20	23
At work: part time		22	21	22
Unemployed	2	4	7	4
Homemaker/other	75	50	53	51
Total	100	100	100	100

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[1] Source: Special tabulations from ESRI Survey of Income Distribution, Poverty and Usage of State Services, 1987 (Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Hannan & Creighton 1989)

employment than the latter. About half of the naíonra mothers in paid employment are part-time workers. In part this higher economic activity rate reflects the average educational qualifications of these women, discussed in detail in the next section. The differences between naíonra mothers living in the Gaeltacht and the Galltacht are small, with only slightly more Galltacht mothers working than Gaeltacht mothers.

Respondents were asked to describe their present job and that of their partner. Those not currently in employment (including full-time home-makers and the unemployed) were asked to describe their last job. The self-administered nature of the questionnaire, and the need to pre-code responses for cost reasons, imposed limits on the nature of the occupational classification which could be used. An approximate comparison can, however, be made with the general population of mothers and fathers of young children (at least one aged 4 years or less), as represented by the ESRI (1987) Survey of Income Distribution, Poverty and Usage of State Services. The summarised results are shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 indicates that there are some differences between the occupational status of naíonra parents living in the Galltacht and the Gaeltacht, as well as differences between naíonra parents and population parents. Overall, naíonra parents who live in the Gaeltacht appear to be somewhat more similar to the general population of parents in the ESRI sample than to Galltacht parents, apart from having a higher proportion of the self-employed. Galltacht fathers and mothers who choose to send their child to a naíonra are also more likely to be self-employed than the general population of parents, and, in addition, they are more likely to have a non-manual occupation than either the general population of parents or the Gaeltacht naíonra parents. Overall, this points to higher than average occupational status among Galltacht naíonra parents, while Gaeltacht naíonra parents are more similar to the general population of parents, apart from higher levels of self-employment.

Table 3.4 Occupational status

Occupation	*% Population fathers[1] N=679*	*% Naionra fathers*		*% Population mothers[1] N=716*	*% Naionra mothers*	
		Gall. N=1256	*Gael. N=395*		*Gall. N=1352*	*Gael. N=424*
Manual	44	32	42	29	21	29
Non-manual	35	46	28	68	73	62
Self-employed	11	16	18	1	5	6
Farmer	11	6	12	2	1	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

1. Source: Special tabulations from ESRI Survey of Income Distribution, Poverty and Usage of State Services, 1987 (Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Hannan & Creighton 1989).

There are quite strong selection effects operating within particular non-manual occupational categories. For example, about 25% of all naíonra fathers, and 10% of mothers describe their occupational grouping as being professional/managerial or higher civil service; this compares with about 10% of the general population of fathers and 2% of the general population of mothers. Similarly, about 5% of the naíonra fathers and 9% of the naíonra mothers are teachers, as against 2% of fathers and 4% of mothers in the general population.[1] It would appear that parents in these higher occupational status groupings are significantly more likely to send their child to a naíonra. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion (at least a third) of naíonra children, both in the Galltacht and the Gaeltacht, come from homes in which the breadwinner or breadwinners are in manual occupations.

3.2.4 Educational Achievement

Parents were asked to report the highest educational qualification they had reached. These figures, reported in Table 3.5, can be compared with the distributions for the general population of mothers and fathers of pre-school children (i.e., those with at least one child aged 4 years or less) as represented by the relevant sub-group of the Economic and Social Research Institute's (ESRI) Living in Ireland Survey, 1994 .

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[1] While this difference appears small it is significant, since it pertains to a small proportion of the overall, and consequently has a lower error of estimate.

Table 3.5 Parents' and population estimate of parental educational achievement

	Fathers			*Mothers*		
With what qualification did you leave the education system?	*Pop. estimate*[1]	*Naionra* %		*Pop. estimate*[1]	*Naionra* %	
	N=649 %	*Gall N=1215*	*Gael N=364*	*N=708* %	*Gall N=1296*	*Gael N=392*
No qualification beyond primary	25	5	13	24	5	6
Group or Inter Certificate	34	32	38	25	23	25
Leaving Certificate	22	30	28	36	41	42
Third-level (diploma/non-degree)	7	16	13	8	20	18
University degree	7	12	6	5	9	7
Master's degree or higher	5	5	1	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

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1. Source: Special tabulations from ESRI Living in Ireland Survey, 1994. (Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Whelan & Williams 1996).

There is very little difference between the educational profile of naíonra mothers living in the Galltacht and the Gaeltacht, with the majority having at least Leaving Certificate. There are some differences between the fathers, with half as many again Galltacht naíonra fathers (33%) having third-level qualifications as Gaeltacht naíonra fathers 20%), and somewhat more Gaeltacht naíonra fathers (51%) having qualifications lower than the Leaving Certificate than Galltacht naíonra fathers (37%). However, the proportion of naíonra fathers in the Galltacht and Gaeltacht who had completed their Leaving Certificate was similar, at about 29%, and slightly higher than the 22% of population fathers who had their Leaving Certificates.

The differences between the naíonra parents and the general population of parents are much larger than those between Galltacht and Gaeltacht naíonra parents. This comparison can be summed up as follows: overall, twice as many naíonra mothers had a third-level education (30%) as population mothers (15%), slightly more had their Leaving Certificate (41%) than population mothers (36%); while naíonra mothers were much less likely than those in the general population to have finished their education before Leaving Certificate level (29% as against 49%).

Similarly, more naíonra fathers had third-level education (30%) than population fathers (19%), slightly more naíonra fathers had their Leaving Certificate (29%) than population fathers (22%) and far fewer naíonra fathers had qualifications lower than Leaving Certificate (40%) than their counterparts in the general population (59%). Thus, it appears that highly educated parents are significantly better represented among those choosing naíonraí than in the general population of parents.

Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) also noted that the parents of children attending all-Irish schools in Dublin had a higher proportion with third-level education than the estimate for an overall Dublin average. They found that 33% of fathers in their study had third-level education, and 17% of mothers, compared to an estimated Dublin average for that time (based on a wider age-group than a sample of parents of young children) of 7%. The larger proportion of mothers with third-level education in the naíonra study in 1993 probably reflects the social changes since 1979, such as the introduction of free second-level education and the lifting of the ban on married women in the public service. Another divergence from the All-Irish school parents in the 1979 study is that the numbers who left school without at least the Group or Intermediate Certificates is also much lower in the naíonra survey, at only 5% of mothers and 7% of fathers, compared to 19% and 22% respectively in the all-Irish school study in 1979.

It is clear that both the naíonra parents (in 1993) and the Dublin All-Irish school parents (in 1979) were, on average, significantly more likely to have a third-level education than the corresponding general populations. The educational profile for naíonra fathers living in the Galltacht appears quite similar to that of the Dublin All-Irish school fathers in 1979, and the Gaeltacht fathers occupy a middle position, being slightly lower than the Galltacht fathers, but higher than the general population of fathers.

Overall, the finding of significantly higher education standards among parents choosing Irish immersion than in the general population of parents is supported by this study. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that parents who choose a naíonra are not a homogenous educated elite, since over a third of Galltacht naíonra fathers, half of Gaeltacht naíonra fathers and almost a third of naíonra mothers in the Galltacht and Gaeltacht had left school before their Leaving Certificate.

3.3 PARENTS' LANGUAGE BACKGROUND

Several questions focused on parents' abilities in Irish, and their use of Irish in the home. The first question asked respondents to report the Irish ability of their own parents and that of their partner's parents; that is, the Irish ability of the grandparents of the children surveyed in the naíonraí. The majority of respondents and their partners in the Galltacht indicated that their own parents were not fluent Irish speakers, while about a fifth had at least one parent who was fluent. Among Gaeltacht respondents, two-thirds had at least one parent who was fluent in Irish.

However, parental ability is not equivalent to home language use, so the naíonra parents were asked about the language used in their own homes as they were growing up, in order to ascertain the proportions who were native speakers or bilingual from childhood. Table 3.6 shows that the majority of Galltacht naíonra parents grew up in homes where Irish was never used. The ITÉ 1993 National Survey on Languages offers some

Table 3.6 Irish ability of respondents' parents, and respondents' own childhood language background

Parents of respondent/spouse[1]	*% Galltacht N=2399*	*% Gaeltacht N=823*	*% Overall*[2] *N=3222*	
Both parents fluent	4	42	14	
One parent fluent	16	24	18	
Neither parent fluent	79	34	68	
Total	100	100	100	
Irish spoken in naionra parents' own home	*% Galltacht N=2491*	*% Gaeltacht N=878*	*% Overall*[2] *N=3369*	*ITÉ '93*[3] *N=526*
As a rule	2	30	9	1
Frequently	4	12	6	1
Occasionally	26	24	25	7
Never	68	34	59	92
Total	100	100	100	100

1 'Parents of respondent/spouse' refers to the grandparents of the children attending the naionra.

2. Data from respondents and their partners are merged here for the fullest coverage possible of language background on each side of the child's family, and also for comparability with the mixed-sex ITÉ data.

3. Source: Special tabulations from ITÉ (1993) National Survey of Languages (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin 1994). These figures relate only to respondents aged less than 45 years, in order to match the age profile of the naionra parents. There were 526 respondents in this age-group in the ITÉ survey, comprising 53.9% of the total sample. The ITÉ survey categories were worded differently, and the categories 'Irish mostly' and 'Irish and English equally' were merged here for comparison with the category 'frequently'. 'Mostly English' was compared with 'Occasionally'. For comparability, non-applicable or missing responses are distributed proportionally.

comparative data on language background. While the questions used differ[1], some comparison of respondents' childhood home language experience is possible. The ITÉ national sample had a higher proportion of respondents (92%) from a background in which only English was used, compared to only 68% of Galltacht naíonra parents. This points to a higher probability of having heard some Irish in the home as a child among the Galltacht naíonra parents than among the general population of under 45-year-olds. Nevertheless, a substantial majority of Galltacht naíonra parents came from homes where only English was spoken. On the other hand, only a minority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents (about a third) had no experience of Irish in their own childhood homes.

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[1] The ITÉ (1993) question asks about the frequency of Irish use between a respondent's parents, between the respondent and each of his/her parents and between the respondent and his/her siblings. The answers on each of these levels were found to be extremely similar, and in this comparison only figures relating to the use of Irish between the respondents' parents are presented.

It is noteworthy that less than a third (30%) of Gaeltacht naíonra parents reported that Irish had been used 'as a rule' in their own homes when they were growing up. Yet 42% of this group of respondents reported that both their parents were fluent Irish speakers. Thus, it appears that the grandparents of the Gaeltacht children in this naíonra survey who were both fluent Irish speakers had divided into those who used only Irish in their homes, and those who used Irish 'frequently' but not exclusively, showing a drift from exclusive home use of the language in the preceding generation.

Table 4.3 in the next chapter examines the naíonra parents' reported language use with their own children, and this also shows some decline (to 22%) among Gaeltacht naíonra parents who spoke only Irish to their own children. While it can be observed that this difference is less marked than in the preceding generation, this comparison can only be tentative, since the categories used ('Irish spoken as a rule' and 'home language Irish only') differed. Nevertheless, it may be an indication of some continuing intergenerational drift in the use of Irish in Gaeltacht homes.

3.3.1 Medium of Instruction in Parents' Schools

Respondents were asked about the type of school they and their spouse had attended, and also about the type of school they want for their children. The figures in Table 3.7 on parents' own schooling show that only a minority of Galltacht naíonra parents and the comparable age-group from the ITÉ (1993) National Survey of Languages had attended an Irish-medium or part-Irish-medium primary or post-primary school, whereas the majority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents had. Naíonra parents in the Galltacht did not therefore experience a higher level of Irish-medium education themselves than did the general population of their peers. Gaeltacht naíonra parents, on the other hand, had mainly Irish-medium education, though it is interesting that a third of those presently living in the Gaeltacht had attended English-medium primary schools, and somewhat less than half had attended English-medium post-primary schools. The higher proportion for post-primary schools is linked to the fact that Irish-medium post-primary schools have always been less available than primaries. However, since Gaeltacht areas normally have and had access to Irish-medium primary schools, it is possible that many of the naíonra parents who attended English-medium primary schools were later in-migrants or returned migrants to the Gaeltacht.

With regard to their wishes for their own children, the majority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents, regardless of their own school experience, wish to have Irish-medium education for their children at primary and post-primary level, though there is some drift to English-medium and part-Irish at post-primary.

Among Galltacht naíonra parents there is strong demand for Irish-medium primary education, with almost two-fifths wishing to send their child to an all-Irish school, and another quarter wishing for partial immersion. This desire to send their children to Irish-immersion primary schools is slightly higher among naíonra parents (at 39%) than was noted in the ITÉ (1993) survey of the general population, at 30%. Only one third of these respondents wish to send their child to a fully English-medium primary school. It is noteworthy that almost eight times as many of the Galltacht naíonra parents as had experience themselves of Irish-medium primary schools would choose to send their own child to such a primary school. This demand also illustrates the importance of a naíonra in drawing together interested parents who, after positive experience of the naíonra, may then become active in lobbying for the establishment of Irish-immersion schools in their area. The number of all-Irish schools in Galltacht areas has increased from 71 in 1992/3 to 95 in the 1995/6 school year.

Table 3.7 Parents' own school type, and school wished for naíonraí children

	% ITÉ 1993[1]	*% Naionra parents*[2] *themselves attended*		*%*[3] *Naíonra respondents' wishes for own child*	
Type of Primary School	*N=526*	*Gall. N=2462*	*Gael N=706*	*Gall. N=1284*	*Gael. N=367*
All-Irish or Gaeltacht	4	5	54	39	68
Part-Irish (more than 1 subject)	7	11	13	26	25
Ordinary national school (Eng.med)	88	84	32	35	8
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Type of Secondary School	*N=526*	*N=2462*	*N=706*	*N=1284*	*N=367*
All-Irish or Gaeltacht	4	5	43	25	52
Part-Irish (more than 1 subject)	5	9	13	33	31
Ordinary school (Irish as subject)	90	86	44	42	17
Total	100	100	100	100	100

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1. ITÉ (1993) figures relate only to respondents aged less than 45 years, in order to match the age profile of the naionra parents. There were 526 respondents in this age-group in the ITÉ (1993) survey, comprising 53.9 of the total sample. The ITÉ categories were worded slightly differently, but were considered comparable. For comparability, non-applicable or missing responses are distributed proportionally. Source: Special tabulations from ITÉ (1993) National Survey of Language (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994).
2. Data on respondents and spouses are merged here, for comparability with the mixed-sex ITÉ sample.
3. Percentages shown in the table refer to the valid responses for each question.

Overall, 68% of respondents said there was an all-Irish primary school accessible to them, with 80% of these indicating that it was up to 2 miles away, 15% reporting such a school 3 to 6 miles from their home, and a minority indicating accessibility up to 26 miles. However, no data were collected on whether these parents were assured of a place for their child in their local all-Irish school, though a number of parents noted that they were doubtful about securing a place for their child, due to the pressure of demand on the school. Stiúrthóirí also commented in some cases that not all of the children from their groups could be accommodated in the local all-Irish school, and that in the past some parents had been forced to send their children to national (English-medium) schools.

A quarter of Galltacht naíonra parents and a half of Gaeltacht naíonra parents would opt for Irish-medium secondary education for their children, with another third of each group indicating a preference for partial immersion at secondary level. However, the unavailability of Irish-medium secondary schools must play a role in parents' response to this question. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) also noted a lower interest in all-Irish secondary schooling than primary, with 50% of their (Galltacht) respondents indicating that they might not send their child to such a school. They found that the inaccessibility of such schools was the primary reason cited, but other reasons were also indicated, such as an attitude that children would have sufficient Irish after an all-Irish primary school. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin comment:

> Although the evidence is by no means conclusive, it would appear that many parents are satisfied if their children receive all-Irish education at the primary level only.....implying an important perceived role for all-Irish primary education in isolation.
>
> Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979:45)

This argument may also underlie Hindley's (1990:166) contention that 'when [Gaeltacht] parents have a choice [of post-primary school]...it is evident that many or most opt for the English-medium alternative'. Hindley claims that increasing the provision of Irish-medium post-primary schools will not solve this decline, which is connected to macro-level factors such as the changes in educational incentives and greater individual mobility.

However, among the naíonra parents living in the Gaeltacht, a majority said they would choose full or partial Irish-medium post-primary education for their children, with 52% choosing a Gaeltacht/all-Irish post-primary school, and another 31% choosing a partial-immersion school. Only 17% of Gaeltacht naíonra parents said they would choose an English-medium post-primary school, indicating that Hindley's claim is not, in general, true of this group of Gaeltacht parents. Given the variation in local school provision, however, it is possible that some of those opting in the Gaeltacht for a 'part-Irish' secondary school would ultimately choose an English-medium school, if their operational choice was between an all-Irish and all-English school. Nevertheless, the majority of naíonra parents in the Gaeltacht reported that they wished to have full or part Irish-medium education for their children at post-primary level.

Overall, however, it must be remembered that the wishes for post-primary schooling from a group of parents of pre-school children must be interpreted cautiously, since this question is asking them to project almost 10 years into the future, before many of them have had any experience even of primary education for their children. Cross-tabulations of choice of secondary school by respondents' age showed no discernible age effect.

3.4 PARENTS' IRISH ABILITY

Parents were asked to assess their own and their spouse's ability in Irish speaking, understanding, writing and reading. It is of interest again to compare the results in Table 3.8 on part of these questions with the responses of a general sample of adults (aged 45 or less) in the ITÉ National Survey on Languages (1993) (Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1994) to a similar question. The latter is blank where such information was not comparable. Table 3.8 presents the overall results for naíonra parents, while Table 3.9 presents a breakdown for Galltacht and Gaeltacht parents.

Table 3.8 Naíonra parents' Irish ability (Valid Percent)

Understanding	*%[1] Fathers N=1586*	*% Mothers[2] N=1748*	*% Parents N=3334*	*% ITÉ '93[3] N=526*
No Irish	5	3	4	
A few words	16	14	15	
Simple sentences	14	14	14	
Parts of conversations	30	35	33	
Most conversations	20	21	21	
Any conversation	15	13	14	
Speaking	*N=1603*	*N=1753*	*N=3356*	*N=526*
No Irish	6	4	5	10
A few words	19	15	17	27
Simple sentences	18	19	18	22
Parts of conversations	30	38	34	27
Most conversations	15	14	14	11
Any conversation	13	11	12	2
Reading	*N=1563*	*N=1732*	*N=3295*	
Not a word	8	5	6	
A few words	16	13	14	
Simple sentences	24	23	23	
Short article/letter/note	29	37	33	
A book	23	21	22	
Writing	*N=1568*	*N=1732*	*N=3300*	
Not a word	13	9	11	
A few words	22	20	21	
Simple sentences	27	31	29	
Short article/letter/note	24	28	26	
A book	14	12	13	

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1. Percentages shown in the table refer to the valid responses for each question.
2. Respondents to this questionnaire were mainly mothers, but they also supplied information about their partner, if they had one. Other variations in the number of cases are due to item non-response (2.5 to 3.5% on own ability, and 3.5 to 7.5% for questions on spouse's abilities).
3. These data relate only to the 53.9% of the ITÉ (1993) survey who were aged under 45 years at the time of the survey. The wording of some of the categories in the ITÉ survey was slightly different, but was judged to be comparable with the categories used in the naíonra survey. Source: Special tabulations from ITÉ (1993) National Survey on Languages (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin 1994).

The overall results in Table 3.8 show a higher proportion of naíonra parents with fluency in Irish, and a lower proportion with no Irish than was found in the ITÉ sample of adults in the same age-group. In general, about a quarter of naíonra parents overall had moderate (point 5 on each scale) or native-like ability (point 6) in speaking Irish. The reported ability levels for Irish comprehension, reading and writing were higher than the speaking ability reported. Naíonra fathers and mothers did not differ significantly in their language competence.

Table 3.9 presents these results divided by Galltacht/Gaeltacht. In his study of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht Ó Riagáin (1992) used a similar rating scale, and he grouped the first four points on his scale as 'weak/no Irish', while point 5 ('most conversations') was deemed to represent 'moderate Irish' and the top point was judged to be 'high ability in Irish'. In the discussion which follows, this categorisation is adopted, except that point 4 'parts of conversations' is judged to represent 'weak-moderate' Irish.

Table 3.9 Parents' ability to speak Irish by Galltacht/Gaeltacht

	% Naíonra Fathers		*% Naíonra Mothers*		*ITÉ*
Irish speaking ability	*Galltacht N=1228*	*Gaeltacht N=351*	*Galltacht N=1335*	*Gaeltacht N=393*	*1993[1] N=526*
Not a word	6	2	4	3	10
A few words	21	10	17	8	27
Simple sentences	21	7	21	11	22
Parts of conversations	33	19	42	25	27
Most conversations	12	25	11	24	11
Any conversation	6	37	6	28	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Irish speaking ability	*% Galltacht Naíonra Parents N=2563*	*% Gaeltacht Naíonra Parents N=744*	*% ITÉ '93 N=526*
Not a word	5	2	10
A few words	19	9	27
Simple sentences	21	9	22
Parts of conversations	37	22	27
Most conversations	11	25	11
Any conversation	6	32	2
Total	100	100	100

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1. These data relate only to the 53.9% of the ITÉ (1993) survey who were aged 45 or less at the time of the survey. Source: Special tabulations, ITÉ (1993) National Survey of Languages (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin 1994).

Table 3.9 indicates that naíonra parents in the Galltacht are broadly similar to the ITÉ national sample of those aged between 20-45 years regarding ability in spoken Irish. A significantly greater proportion of Galltacht naíonra parents reported that they had high ability in Irish (6%) than in the ITÉ national sample (2%), and a larger proportion (37%) of them had weak-moderate ('parts of conversations) Irish than the ITÉ sample (27%). Almost half (45%) of Galltacht naíonra parents had either very weak or no Irish ability, compared to 59% of the ITÉ survey. Overall, it must be noted that about four-fifths of both the ITÉ sample and the Galltacht naíonra parents had weak-moderate, weak or no Irish, and only one-fifth of Galltacht naíonra parents and one-sixth of the ITÉ national sample had moderate or high ability in Irish. The comparative figures for the Gaeltacht show that over half (57%) of the Gaeltacht respondents and their spouses had moderate or fluent Irish, while 22% had weak-moderate Irish and 20% had weak or no spoken Irish.

It is of interest to note that the Ó Riagáin and Gliasáin (1979:28) study of the parents of children in all-Irish schools in Dublin city found a higher proportion (40%) of their respondents to be at the top two points on their six-point speaking ability scale (ranging from 'no Irish' to 'native speaker ability'), compared to only 17% of Galltacht naíonra parents. This may point to a 'leavening out' of the parents with lower Irish ability by the decision to opt for all-Irish primary schooling. Thus, it may be that the Galltacht naíonra parents have a slightly larger proportion of fluent Irish speakers among them than the general population, but a lower proportion than the parents of all-Irish schools. However, this difference must be interpreted cautiously, given the differences between the two studies in terms of sample, sample size and methodology.

There are some differences between mothers and fathers in Table 3.9. More naíonra mothers in the Galltacht (42%) reported weak-moderate (parts of conversations) competence than Galltacht naíonra fathers (33%) or the ITÉ sample (27%). Conversely, more fathers in the Gaeltacht naíonra sample had high Irish ability (37%) than Gaeltacht mothers (28%) or the national sample.

Ó Riagáin (1992:51), in a study of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht (N=152) found that 25% of his respondents from that particular Gaeltacht fell into the four lowest levels of a similar scale. However, Table 3.9 shows that a significantly higher proportion of 42% of Gaeltacht naíonra parents rated themselves to be in the bottom four categories on the present, similar, scale. An analysis of the naíonra parents' Irish ability which looked only at the higher of the ability levels reported for a household is presented in Table 3.10. Taking the first four categories to represent 'Weak/None' as in Ó Riagáin's study, Table 3.10 indicates that in about 28% of the homes of naíonra children in the Gaeltacht, both parents have weak or no Irish. In another 27% of naíonra homes in the Gaeltacht there is at least one parent who has moderate Irish, and in the remaining 44% there is at least one who has fluent Irish.

Table 3.10 'Better half' ability to speak Irish by Galltacht/Gaeltacht

Irish speaking ability of partner reported to have superior ability in couple	*Galltacht N=1342 %*	*Gaeltacht N=394 %*
Not a word	1.1	1.0
A few words	8.8	3.3
Simple sentences	18.3	5.8
Parts of conversations	43.7	18.3
Most conversations	18.2	27.4
Any conversation	9.9	44.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Ó Riagáin's (1992) study indicated that there was a link between low levels of Irish ability in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht and in-migration. That is, respondents who were born outside of the Gaeltacht were more likely to have low Irish competence than non-in-migrants. Since 35% of the marriages which did not have high spoken Irish abilities in that Gaeltacht district included one or both in-migrants, and another 33% of this lower Irish ability group had one or both partners who had left the Gaeltacht and then returned, Ó Riagáin concluded that:

> ..both in-migration and return migration are associated with the decline in the percentage of marriages where both partners have high levels of ability in Irish...These processes have been increasing in importance in recent decades and we have no reason to suppose that these trends are likely to change in the near future.
>
> Ó Riagáin (1992:137)

However, it is important to note that this study differs from Ó Riagáin's both in the time of data collection (Ó Riagáin's data were collected in 1983, 10 years before the naíonra data) and, more importantly, in the fact that the Gaeltacht sample in the naíonra study was not picked to be representative of the Gaeltacht.

Cross-tabulations between speaking ability and occupation showed that, among Gaeltacht naíonra parents, the distribution of Irish speaking ability was similar for each of the occupational categories manual, non-manual, self-employed and farmers. Among Galltacht respondents, 13% of non-manual workers had high Irish ability, compared to only 5% of the other occupational groups. When moderate Irish ability was included, 32% of Galltacht naíonra parents in non-manual occupations had at least moderate Irish speaking ability, compared to only 15% of the other occupational groups. Thus, as expected, Galltacht naíonra parents showed a stronger link between occupation and Irish ability than did Gaeltacht naíonra parents.

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

The demographic profile shows that the naíonra parents differ as a group from comparable groups in the general population in their educational achievements, labour force status and occupation. While this indicates a greater take-up of naíonra provision among the better educated and better-off, it must be noted that there is a significant proportion of naíonra parents (roughly a third) who have low educational levels, having left school before the Leaving Certificate and who work in manual jobs. Similarly, while the naíonra parents include a higher proportion of those with high levels of ability in Irish than in the general population, nevertheless, over 80% of Galltacht respondents and 40% of Gaeltacht respondents reported that they had weak or no Irish. Thus, it would be inaccurate to claim that Galltacht and Gaeltacht naíonra parents represent two homogenous groups in terms of occupation, educational achievement or Irish ability, since there is considerable variation in each group.

This investigation of the Irish background of naíonra children's parents and grandparents allows a broader perspective on the role of the naíonra. Lopez (1994) reiterates Paulston's (1992) claims that research on bilingual education remains largely confined to narrow attempts to evaluate particular programme designs, without taking into account the societal factors which underlie the language outcomes of bilingual education. Ó Murchú (1980) has also argued that the results of bilingual education must be assessed in terms of its objectives, but also in terms of the many factors which influence the learner, such as the status and level of usage of the language in the community, the attitudes and policies of the State, and social pressures regarding language use. Thus, in examining the naíonraí, it is imperative to take account of the child's immediate community, the family, and to investigate what experiences of Irish education and socio-demographic factors have brought this family to choose a naíonra. Some of these issues are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

The Parents and the Naíonraí

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Parents are central to pre-primary education in lesser-used languages. As Ó Murchú (1987:20) noted they are 'the motivating, initiating and driving force'. The importance of the parental role in intervention pre-schooling has been well attested in the literature (see, for example, Hohmann *et al.* 1979 for a discussion), and research also indicates that parents play a central role in early immersion education (Ó Murchú 1987, Lyon and Ellis 1991, Lyon, 1996 and van der Goot *et al.* 1994). However, this role is one which can be undervalued by parents themselves, many of whom believe that the 'real work' of language learning only happens within the naíonra itself, and who see their own function as providing more practical help only. Section 4.2 reports on parents' reasons for choosing a naíonra, and Section 4.3 examines their satisfaction with the child's progress. Section 4.4 looks at the children's home language and Irish ability before entering the naíonra, while Section 4.5 looks at the effect of naíonra attendance on parents' use of Irish in the home. Section 4.6 surveys parents' involvement in the naíonra and Section 4.7 looks at the services parents would welcome regarding the naíonra.

4.2 REASONS FOR CHOOSING A NAÍONRA

Parents were asked about the factors which played a role in their decision to send their child to a naíonra. This question allowed respondents to select several reasons for choosing the naíonra and the numbers therefore do not add to 100%. These factors selected are ranked in Table 4.1 from the most often chosen to the least frequently cited, with the percentage of parents who selected each. The reason most frequently cited for sending a child to a naíonra was the parents' desire that the child learn Irish. While this might appear obvious, it shows that parents do believe that attendance at a naíonra will significantly help their child to learn Irish. The second most frequent reason was the general reputation of a particular naíonra or Stiúrthóir, indicating that word-of-mouth plays a significant role in promoting the naíonraí.

It was interesting that only a third of parents stated that their intention of sending their child on to all-Irish primary schooling later was one of their reasons for choosing a naíonra, although 44% reported in another question that they did so intend at that time.

and another 13% were considering it. Thus, it may be that when deciding to send a child to a naíonra, parents see the child's exposure to Irish there as beneficial in itself, without necessarily intending that they will go on to all-Irish immersion schools, either because they have not yet made up their minds, do not wish to opt for an all-Irish school, or because none is available to them.

Table 4.1 Reasons for choosing to send child to naíonra

Reasons selected[1]	*% Respondents N=1807*
In order that child will learn Irish (L)	68
Supervisor's/local naíonra's reputation (N)	59
Child to go to all-Irish school later (L)	33
Only/most accessible pre-school in area (N)	32
Naíonra has good facilities (N)	30
Parent/sibling attended naíonra/AIS (L)	27
Strong recommendation by friend (N)	26
Child knows some Irish from home (L)	5
Child is an Irish native-speaker (L)	4

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1. (L) and (N) indicate language and non-language/educational reasons respectively, a classification used in some later analyses.

Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) carried out a study of 110 mothers of children in Dublin all-Irish schools. They categorised the reasons given for choosing an all-Irish school into 'language only reasons', 'non-language/educational reasons' and 'both types of reason'. They found that about a third of those parents chose all-Irish primary schools for language only reasons, another third for non-language/educational reasons, and the remainder for a mixture of both types of reason. A similar exercise was carried out on the answers to this question in the naíonra survey, when the factors marked (L) in Table 4.1 were classed as 'language reasons' and those marked (N) as 'non-language/educational reasons'. The results are shown in Table 4.2, cross-tabulated by location.

Overall, it appears that the majority of naíonra parents choose to send their child to a naíonra for a mixture of language and non-language/educational reasons. However, roughly a fifth of parents in the Galltacht opt for a naíonra for language reasons only, and almost a fifth do so for non-language reasons only such as accessibility, facilities and general reputation. Fewer parents in the Gaeltacht (12%) make their choice for language reasons only. The higher proportion of those basing their decision on both language and non-language reasons in the naíonra survey than in the Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin survey of all-Irish school parents is probably due to the fact that people opting into non-compulsory pre-school education are more likely to include non-language/educational

Table 4.2 Categorisation of reasons for choosing naíonra by location

Reasons for choosing a naíonra	*% Galltacht* *N=1354*	*% Gaeltacht* *N=425*	*% Overall* *N=1779*
Language reasons only	21	12	19
Non-language/educational	18	19	18
Both language and educational	60	68	62
Total	100[1]	100	100

[1] Totals here and in many other tables do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

reasons in their decision process than those choosing between types of school in the compulsory school system.

When asked who first suggested sending their child to a naíonra, 64% of respondents reported that it was they themselves, 13% indicated that it was neighbours with children attending the naíonra, 9% said it was relatives or friends, 5% their partner, and 4% said it was the idea of both parents. Other sources of advice mentioned less frequently were the Stiúrthóir herself (2%), work-mates (1%) and others (2%).

Parents who said that they were considering sending a child to an all-Irish primary school were asked how important they judged Irish-medium pre-schooling to be. Only 75% of all respondents chose to answer this question, and 87% of these said that it was 'very important', 12% thought it 'not very important' and just 1% said that it was 'not important at all'. These figures contrast significantly with the response of all-Irish school parents in Dublin in the Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979) study, which found that only 28% of those parents thought that the provision of Irish-medium pre-schooling was important, and 36% thought it not at all important. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin explained this low interest as representative of parents' high levels of satisfaction with their all-Irish school and the child's progress in Irish, even without pre-schooling through Irish. However, they added:

> It is clear from our study of home bilingualism that the earlier in the family cycle that children acquire competence in Irish, the better are the possibilities for home use of Irish being established. As few parents appear able to do this by themselves, there would seem to be an *a priori* case for all-Irish pre-school units where there can be a follow-through to an all-Irish primary school.
>
> Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin (1979:130)

It is interesting that the discussion about the value of early exposure to a language has now shifted to an even earlier age group, and that there exists in Wales a family project which aims to establish patterns of at least some Welsh use in the home with babies and very young children (Brooke 1992). There is also evidence of interest in a similar scheme here, with the start of an Irish-medium Parent and Toddler group known as *Na Mamailínigh* in Dublin. The subject of Parent and Toddler groups will be discussed in Section 4.7.1.

4.3 SATISFACTION LEVEL AND PERCEPTION OF PROGRESS

Parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their decision to choose a naíonra, with 96% reporting that they 'would do the same again, with the same naíonra'. Another 3% said that they would choose the same naíonra, but wait until their child was older. Only 1% said they would prefer to send their child to an English-medium play-group. Overall, 96% of respondents felt that their child enjoyed the naíonra. There were no significant differences between Gaeltacht and Galltacht parents regarding satisfaction, except that marginally more Gaeltacht parents (5%) said they 'would choose the same naíonra, but wait until child is older' than Galltacht parents (2%).

Parents were asked to indicate how their child viewed the naíonra. Again, there were no significant differences between Gaeltacht and Galltacht parents, and overall 92% reported that their child enjoyed it, 7% said that their child was initially confused, but later settled in. Only 1.5% reported that their child was 'still struggling, sometimes reluctant to go' and 0.5% that their child was 'very unhappy, always reluctant to go'.

92% of parents reported an increase in their child's use of Irish after at least 2 terms in the naíonra (7% saw no change and 1% reported a decrease). Of those reporting an increase, almost 60% stated that this took the form of individual words or rhymes and songs which the child used 'regularly' at home, while another 25% stated that these were 'sometimes' used. Gaeltacht parents were more likely to report an increase in regular Irish conversation by the child (19%) than Galltacht parents (5%).

Most of this increased use of Irish was directed at parents (84%), grandparents (48%) and extended family (32%). Interestingly, 28% of parents reported that their child spoke Irish in play with dolls, cars and other toys. This supports Karniol's (1990) observation that young children acquiring an L2 through immersion day-care practise their new L2 in doll play. Karniol commented that dolls were assigned the names of other children in the immersion situation and 'reprimanded, changed, sung and 'read' to, danced with, fed and generally conversed with' (p.159).

Parents' perception of progress in their children was not confined to the increase they observed in their Irish. Over 80% also reported that their child:

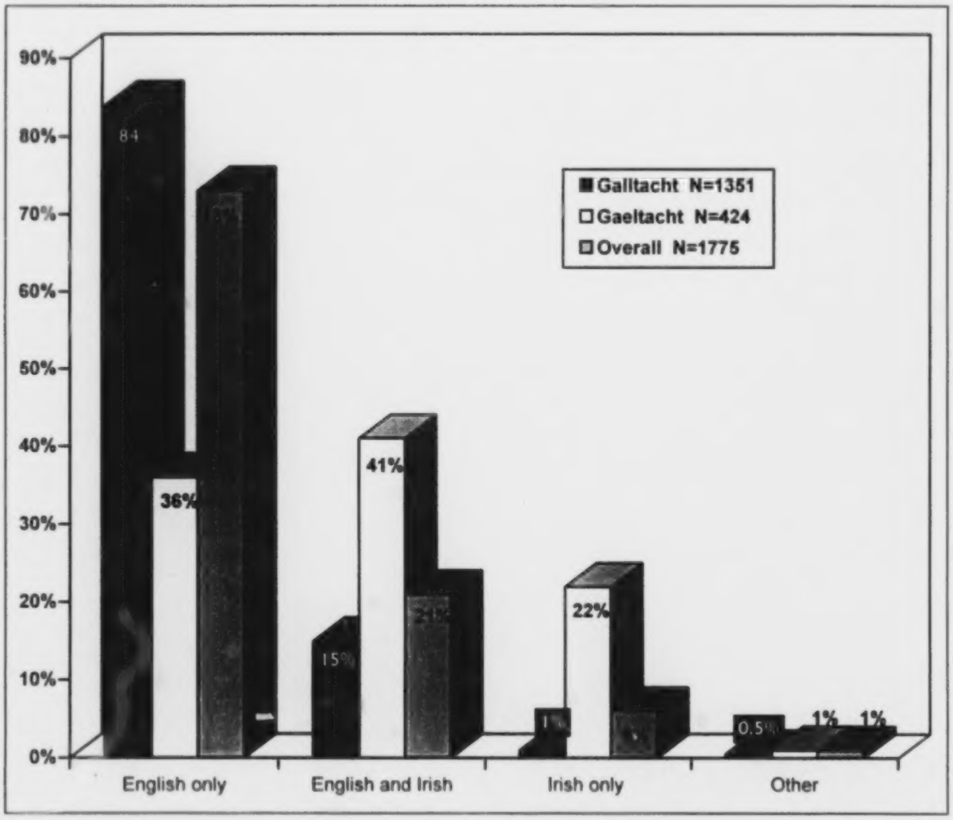
- now knows colours, shapes and some letters
- can now count to a higher number than before
- now knows songs and rhymes in Irish

56% stated that they felt their child's English skills had also improved, whereas only 1% felt that the child's L1 English had fallen behind its peers.

4.4 CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE BACKGROUND

Only 4% of parents in Table 4.1 cited as a reason for choosing a naíonra the fact that their child was a native speaker of Irish, and a further 5% stated it was because their child knew some Irish from home. However, since parents were here responding to a question about why they had chosen to send their child to a naíonra, their answers to that question should not be taken as strictly representative of their children's language backgrounds. In response to another question, parents reported the language they had spoken to their child 'as a baby and toddler' and these data are presented in Figure 4.1. Almost three-quarters of all parents reported that they had spoken only English to their child as a baby and toddler, 21% said they had spoken English and Irish, 6% said they had spoken only Irish, and almost 1% overall stated they had spoken a language other than Irish or English.

Fig. 4.1 Children's language background in the Galltacht and Gaeltacht



Less that a quarter of Gaeltacht parents reported using 'Irish only' to their child. This is comparable with Harris and Murtagh's (1987) investigation of older Gaeltacht children's Irish competence. They found that 46% of Gaeltacht 2nd graders (aged eight to nine years) came from 'English only' homes, 34% came from 'English and Irish' homes, and only 20% from 'Irish only' homes. Thus, both among the sample of pre-schoolers who attend naíonraí in the Gaeltacht and the older children in the Gaeltacht sample by Harris and Murtagh, only a minority come from Irish-only homes.

There is other evidence of low levels of Irish transmission in the Gaeltacht, for example, in Ó Gliasáin's (1990) study of the £10 grant. This grant is awarded to the parents of Gaeltacht children whose command of Irish is deemed to indicate that Irish is the normal language of their home. Only children aged six years and over may apply for this grant so it is not directly comparable with this study, but it is noteworthy that Ó Gliasáin found that only 41% of Gaeltacht-resident primary and secondary school children aged six years and over satisfied the more stringent requirements for this grant, compared to 83% of the same Gaeltacht cohort who were returned in the 1981 Census as being able to speak Irish. There is some effect of school-based acquisition of Irish among children aged six years; for example, Harris and Murtagh found that while only 20% of their 2nd graders reported that they came from 'Irish only' homes, 38% of them received the £10 grant, indicating that some of those from homes where English was spoken in addition to, or instead of, Irish, had advanced sufficiently by age 8-9 years to qualify.

Another question in the naíonra parents' survey asked them to estimate their child's knowledge of Irish before attending the naíonra. Table 4.3 summarises their response. It shows that 72% of children in the Galltacht fell into the categories of 'no Irish' or 'some understanding only' and another 26% had 'odd words and phrases' in Irish before beginning at the naíonra, summing to a total of 98% of Galltacht naíonra children with low or no competence in the language.

The situation reported for Gaeltacht children was that 40% had no Irish or at best some understanding only when beginning at the naíonra, with another 30% having only odd words or phrases in Irish, summing to a total of 70% of the Gaeltacht naíonra children with low or no competence in the language when they began attending the naíonra. Another 30% of parents reported that their child was at least able for a conversation in Irish at the start of their time in the naíonra.

Cross-tabulations with the question about language spoken to the child showed that 68% of the group of Gaeltacht parents whose children had 'no Irish' or 'some understanding only' before beginning at the naíonra stated that they had spoken 'English only' to their child as a baby or toddler, and a further 29% had spoken 'English and Irish'. Among the Gaeltacht parents of children who had at most 'odd words or phrases in Irish', 67% reported that they had spoken 'English and Irish' to their child (and another 30% had

Table 4.3 Children's knowledge of Irish *before* naíonra

How much Irish do you estimate your child knew BEFORE beginning at the naíonra?	*Galltacht N=1350* %	*Gaeltacht N=416* %
No Irish at all	66.7	24.5
Some understanding only	5.1	15.1
Odd words/phrases in Irish	26.4	30.0
Able for conversation in Irish	0.4	2.4
Irish as good as/better than English	1.2	16.1
Irish only	0.3	11.8
Total	100.0	100.0

spoken 'English only') but with such levels of Irish competence as outcome, the balance would appear to have been in favour of English in these households.

Overall, only 22% of the Gaeltacht naíonra parents reported that they had spoken 'Irish only' in their homes[1], a decrease from the figure given by Ní Dhorchaí (1986:38) of 28% (source not cited). She attributed this low representation to the following:

1. Many native-Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht do not see the value of pre-school education and do not send their children to naíonraí.
2. Many Gaeltacht naíonraí are not accessible to the parents of Irish-speaking children.
3. In-migration and return migration has resulted in a high proportion of households in which at least one parent is not a native speaker.

The last point has already been discussed in Chapter 3.4, relating to the proportion of Gaeltacht parents with low or no Irish competence.

Ní Dhorchaí's point regarding the possible lower participation in the naíonraí of Irish-speaking families in the Gaeltacht is an important one, since it must be remembered that the Gaeltacht naíonra parents were not selected as representative of all Gaeltacht families with young children, and that families who choose not to, or who are unable to send their child to a naíonra in the Gaeltacht may possibly be more likely to speak Irish at home.

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[1] Thus, the estimate by Stiúrthóirí that 23.3% of the children in Gaeltacht naíonraí came from 'Irish only' homes is an accurate one (although there was slightly more divergence between the Stiúrthóirí estimate of 'English and Irish' homes at 35% and the parents' reports of such homes, at 41%). The sensitivity of such estimates will allow their use in the future to track developments in the Gaeltacht naíonraí regarding inter-generational transmission for Gaeltacht families *with children in a naíonra*. It must be stressed, however, that this group was not intended to represent all Gaeltacht families with young children.

For comparative purposes, Table 4.5 shows that in the national Census in 1991 (Central Statistics Office 1996), of a total of 2,786 three- to four-year-olds in officially designated Gaeltacht areas, 40% were judged by their head of household to be Irish speakers (this definition included both those returned as speakers of 'Irish only' and 'Irish and English'). Comparison of Census results in the period 1961-1991 shows a decline in Irish speakers in this age group. Table 4.4 shows that, in the period 1961-1991, the proportion of Irish-speaking three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht dropped by a third, from 65% to 40%.

Table 4.4 Comparison of National Census data and Naíonra Census data on Irish ability in three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht .

Census of population	*Total 3-4 year olds in Gaeltacht*	*Number of Irish speakers[1] aged 3-4 years in Gaeltacht*	*% Irish speakers aged 3-4 years in the Gaeltacht*
1961	2,976	1,944	65.3
1971	2,488	1,490	59.9
1981	2,966	1,566	52.8
1991	2,786	1,117	40.1
	N	*N*	*%*
	Total in Gaeltacht naionraí	*Number of reported Irish speakers in Gaeltacht naíonraí*	*Irish speakers in Gaeltacht naíonraí*
Naíonra Census 1993[2]	625	239	40.6
Parents' survey 1993[3]	416	126	30.3

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1. For the Census of Population 'Irish-speakers' is based on those whom the head of household reported 'can speak Irish only' or 'can speak Irish and English'.
2. For comparability with the national Census, in the naíonra Census the proportion whom Stiúrthóirí judged to have 'good competence' or to be 'native speakers' in the middle of the of third naíonra term (for the majority) was computed from Table 2.6. While the naíonra Census yielded 625 children in Gaeltacht naíonraí, Stiúrthóir responses on this question covered only 588.
3. The parents of children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí reported their children's Irish competence before starting in the naíonra, and the figure reported here represents those reported as speaking 'Irish only' 'Irish as good as/better than English' or 'able for conversation in Irish', since the combination of these categories was thought to be closest to the national Census definition of 'speaker of Irish or Irish and English'

In comparison with the Census of Population figures on all three- to four- year-olds in the Gaeltacht, the naíonra Census in 1993 showed that there were 625 children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí, which represents about a quarter of the three- to four-year-old age group in these districts. Of these, we have Stiúrthóir assessments of 588 children after about two terms in the naíonra, showing that 41% of these had, by then, at least 'good competence' in the language. This indicates that the sample of children attending

Gaeltacht naíonraí is, in fact, reasonably similar to the population of three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht, as recorded in the 1991 national Census, although this must be interpreted cautiously, given the different questions posed in the Census and the Stiúrthóir assessments.

Parental questionnaire data reporting children's Irish competence *before* beginning at the naíonra are also available on 416 (67%) of the children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí, and this indicates a lower proportion of Irish speakers among this group, at 30%, compared to 40% in the national Census. Again, these differences must be interpreted cautiously, given the differences in the questions on which they are based, differences in the average age of the children reported on, and the non-response rate. The parents' questionnaire asked about the ability in Irish of children before they began at the naíonra and therefore reports on a group which was, on average, somewhat younger than the population of three- to four-year-olds in the Census of Population and in the Naíonra Census completed by the Stiúrthóirí. Census of Population data show an increase in the proportion of children returned as Irish speakers as the children get older, from 40% at age three to four, to 66% at age five to nine years, showing the effect of school on Irish ability. Thus, the higher proportion of Irish speakers in the Naíonra Census than in the parents' survey may be due in part to the effect of Irish learned in the naíonra, just as the Census of Population proportion may be due in part to the effect of some four-year-olds improving their Irish during Junior Infants in primary school.

Overall, Census data indicate that the proportion of three- to four- year olds in the Gaeltacht with good competence in Irish has declined by about a third since 1971, while the total of three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht has also declined. Only between 30-40% of Gaeltacht children entering naíonraí in 1993 were competent Irish speakers. Evidence from the Gaeltacht naíonra parents' survey indicates that, in fact, only about a quarter of naíonra children in the Gaeltacht come from Irish-only homes, and that, in the 40% of homes in which parents reported both Irish and English were used, there are, in fact, fairly low levels of Irish usage, since in the majority of cases they appear to be producing at most 'odd words and phrases' in Irish among these children.

Commins (1988) noted that, since the percentage of Irish-speakers among three- to four-years-olds can be assumed to indicate the extent of home-generated ability, the large proportion (now the majority) of Gaeltacht children who are not acquiring Irish at home is evidence of parents relying on the schools to transmit Irish to their children. Hindley (1990) also noted that Gaeltacht parents currently have a tendency to 'leave Irish to the schools' and he went on to claim that it is likely that the very existence of Gaeltacht naíonraí allows parents to depend on them for the transmission of Irish, and thus that they 'facilitate the drift [from Irish in the home] rather than halt it' (Hindley 1990:216).[1]

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[1] Hindley (1990: 213) quoted Ó Conchúir (1984) with reference to Egan's (1981) result showing that the quality of Irish among Gaeltacht naíonra children was lower than that of children attending naíonraí in the Galltacht. However, as Chapter 7 will show, this result was not replicated here, with

Hindley contends that Gaeltacht parents are not so much hostile to Irish as committed to the view that English has a higher priority, resulting in their use of English in the home and depending on the school system to teach Irish. However, it would be inaccurate to attribute the decline in the number of Gaeltacht three- to four-year-olds who are Irish-speaking since 1971 in Table 4.4 to the rise in the number of Gaeltacht naíonraí, since this overlooks the widespread and powerful economic and social forces in operation against the language during this period. It is, however, possible that parents who have decided to 'leave Irish to the school system' view the naíonraí as part of that school system already (despite the administrative differences and differences in approach), with the result that the initial decision to use English in the home may not be influenced by the availability of a naíonra *per se*, but rather by a reliance on systematic educational forces outside the home. It is relevant here that only 12% of Gaeltacht naíonra parents chose to send their child there for language reasons alone (a smaller proportion than among Galltacht parents), while two-thirds of Gaeltacht naíonra parents made their choice for both linguistic and educational reasons.

It may be that substantial proportions of Gaeltacht parents choose to use English in the home for economic and/or social reasons (discussed by Ó Tuathaigh 1990), and depend on the educational system to transmit Irish to their children in Irish-medium education. If so, then this makes it more important than ever that Gaeltacht children be given the best possible chance to acquire Irish during their pre-schooling, so that they are prepared adequately for Irish-medium schooling, and so that Gaeltacht primary schools can maintain their use of Irish as the medium of education. It is noteworthy that only about a quarter of the three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht were attending naíonraí in 1993[1]. Taking an estimate that 60-70% of the remainder were mainly English speakers, this would mean that between 1,200 and 1,400 three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht with weak or no Irish ability did not attend naíonraí. Instead, it is likely that these children enrolled later in Gaeltacht primary schools which aim to be Irish-medium, but which must then have come under heavy pressure to use English to accommodate this large proportion of children with little or no experience of the language. An estimated further 600 to 800 children who were Irish-speakers from home also did not attend an Irish-medium pre-school. This shortfall may reflect practical problems such as the difficulty in providing pre-school services for children who are scattered over rural districts, as well as other difficulties in finding personnel and premises, but it points to a pressing need to consider ways of reaching the pre-school population in the Gaeltacht in the near future.

It is also important that any attempt to encourage the use of Irish in Gaeltacht homes should directly address parents' concerns about their children's acquisition of English.

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a larger sample of Gaeltacht children; in fact, Gaeltacht children attending naíonraí achieved higher Irish test scores than children from comparable language backgrounds in Galltacht naíonraí, showing the advantage for Irish acquisition of residence in the Gaeltacht, *whatever* the language of the home.

[1] This is based on the 1991 Census figure of 2,786 three- to four-year-olds in the Gaeltacht. Of the 625 children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí in this study, almost 50% were aged 4 years.

Anxiety that children acquiring English as their second language might not become fully competent English users may discourage parents who are competent Irish speakers from using the language with their children. Information on early language learning, the effect of the pervasiveness of English on its acquisition as a second language, and the strategies to ensure that a high standard of spoken and written English is attained in school might help to alleviate such fears and encourage Irish use in the home. Where one parent is a fluent Irish speaker and one has weak or no Irish there is a need for information on the linguistic and cognitive benefits of early (simultaneous) bilingualism, and on the process of how children acquire two languages at the same time, with back-up and support for parents as their children develop. Misguided 'folklinguistic' beliefs about the danger of confusing children by using more than one language in the home, or about the absolute necessity of using a rigid one-parent-one-language policy, need to be addressed directly in order to promote Irish use in the homes of mixed-ability couples.

Overall, the data presented in Table 4.4 suggest quite a low level of inter-generational transmission of Irish in the Gaeltacht. In the context of the naíonraí, they point to the difficulties faced by Stiúrthóirí in Gaeltacht districts where the balance between native or competent Irish speakers and complete beginners is now frequently tilted towards the latter. Answering the needs of both beginners and native speakers of Irish in the naíonra requires special planning. This issue will be examined in more detail in Hickey (forthcoming).

4.5 NAÍONRA EFFECT ON PARENTS' USE OF IRISH

National surveys in the last twenty years (CLAR 1975; Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin 1984, 1994) have shown that in those samples, fewer than 21% of users claim to have used Irish 'often' or 'several times' since leaving school. This survey of naíonra parents set out to assess how often parents had used Irish in the home before their child started attending the naíonra, and afterwards also, to see if they perceived any change in their level of use. There was already some evidence from small-scale studies of the positive effect of naíonra attendance on Irish use in the home (see Owens, 1992 and Mhic Mhathúna 1995) and this question in the parents' questionnaire set out to establish how widespread the effect might be.

Table 4.5 shows that parents report substantial increases in their use of Irish in the home after a child has spent about a year in the naíonra. While there is no change in the percentage of parents who 'always' use Irish with their partner or children, there is more than a trebling of reported 'regular' use of Irish between the respondent ('self') and her/his children, and a trebling of regular Irish use between the partner and children, and among children in the same family.

Overall, parents report that their use of Irish with their child/ren increases after a child has begun attending the naíonra, and only 8% report 'never' using Irish with their child/ren, compared to 40% before the child attended. In answer to another question,

Table 4.5 Home use of Irish before and after child attended naíonra

Frequency	*% Self and Partner*		*% Self and Child/ren*		*% Partner and Child/ren*		*% Children with each other*	
	Before	*After*	*Before*	*After*	*Before*	*After*	*Before*	*After*
Always	6	6	7	7	6	6	5	5
Regularly	3	7	8	28	5	15	4	12
Sometimes	25	38	44	57	32	49	20	43
Never	56	41	40	8	47	20	57	26
N.A./Missing	10	9	2	1	10	9	14	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

81% of respondents reported that they perceived an increase in the frequency of Irish use in their home since their first child began attending a naíonra.

A Sign-Rank test of these changes showed that there was a significant increase in home use of Irish in all four categories (self and partner, self and children, partner and children, children with each other) after a child began attending a naíonra. Since normal interaction between parents and three-year-old children tends to involve frequent discussion of the child's experiences and everyday activities, it is probable that talk about the child's day in the naíonra offers an opportunity for the use of Irish in the home.

Thus, discussion of the events of the child's session in the naíonra, and the use of naíonra vocabulary to refer to similar home activities, may allow parents and children a valid communicative domain in which to use Irish, without its seeming too unnatural to the speakers. Parents were asked about which activities in the home were most likely to occasion the use of Irish, and their selection is outlined in Table 4.6.

Leaving aside the 'always/mostly' category, which may simply reflect a stable home use pattern for a rather small percentage of households, the activities which parents judged to elicit Irish use on a 'regular' or 'occasional' basis in both Galltacht and Gaeltacht homes were:

- mealtimes (67% regular or occasional use overall)
- washing/dressing the child (61% regular or occasional use overall)
- on journeys (56% regular or occasional use overall)
- reading stories (52% regular or occasional use overall)
- doing housework and gardening (51% regular or occasional use overall)
- helping older children with homework (46% regular or occasional use overall).

Table 4.6 Activities eliciting Irish use after naíonra

Activity *N Gall = 1,354*	*Always/Mostly* %		*Regularly* %		*Occasionally* %		*Never* %	
N Gael = 425	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*
Washing/dressing	7	35	22	21	50	33	22	12
Mealtimes	6	31	25	24	55	34	15	12
Helping homework	10	35	23	22	29	21	38	22
Reading stories	4	26	16	19	44	31	36	24
Family prayer/church	4	36	11	18	26	19	59	28
Housework/garden	3	27	16	17	46	29	35	28
Journeys	3	26	16	16	48	34	32	25
Watching T.V.	2	24	11	14	41	28	46	34
Radio	2	24	4	9	21	22	73	45

Naíonra children would be expected to have experience of activities such as having a meal, putting on their coats, washing their hands and playing with water, hearing stories read to them, and tidying up during the session, so they would have (comprehension and some productive use of) elements of the language used in these domains.

Family activities which were *least* likely to elicit Irish were: listening to the radio and watching T.V. (presumably linked to the very low provision of suitable Irish-medium programmes for this age-group before the advent of Teilifís na Gaeilge), prayer (family/church) in the Galltacht (probably because the majority of parents attend English-medium services, either by choice or due to the lack of an Irish-medium alternative in the Galltacht).

Parents were also asked about their involvement in Irish language activities and these are reported in Table 4.7. Cross-tabulations with home language showed that it was mainly 'Irish only' homes which reported 'always' or 'regular' participation in these activities. Looking therefore at the figures regarding occasional use (which are more indicative of the 'English only' and the 'English and Irish' homes) we see that almost half of Galltacht parents said that they watched *An Nuacht* and other Irish programmes on television occasionally. One-third occasionally read Irish story-books to their children but only one-sixth read Irish books for themselves. One third listened to Irish programmes on national radio occasionally, but less than one sixth listened to Raidió na Gaeltachta occasionally.

Only about a third of Gaeltacht naíonra parents in homes which are predominantly English-speaking even occasionally watched (the then, relatively infrequent) Irish programmes on television or listened to Irish programmes on national radio. Among

Table 4.7 Parents' Irish language activities by Galltacht/Gaeltacht

Activity N Galltacht = 1354	*% Always/ Mostly*		*% Regularly*		*% Occasion-ally*		*% Never*	
N Gaelacht= 425	Gall	*Gael*	Gall	*Gael*	Gall	*Gael*	Gall	*Gael*
Watch non-News T.V. in Irish	6	20	8	17	47	38	38	25
Watch *An Nuacht*	7	24	6	15	45	30	43	30
Listen to Irish radio programs	4	16	5	13	34	33	57	37
Read Irish books to children	5	18	7	14	33	30	54	39
Read Irish articles in papers	2	10	3	8	18	24	76	58
Read Irish books	2	11	2	7	17	30	79	52
Listen to Raidió na Gaeltachta	4	22	3	17	13	22	81	39
Read all-Irish paper/periodical	2	8	1	5	8	19	90	68

these English-speaking Gaeltacht households only about one-fifth listened to Raidió na Gaeltachta occasionally[1]. It would be of interest to assess the impact of Teilifís na Gaeilge on the viewing habits of Galltacht and Gaeltacht naíonra parents and children. Looking at the proportions reporting that they 'never' engaged in a particular activity, we see that the majority of naíonra parents in the Galltacht (76-90%) never read Irish books or all-Irish newspapers or Irish pieces in English-language papers, and they never listened to Raidió na Gaeltachta. Over half of this group say they never read Irish story-books to their children or watched *An Nuacht* on T.V. and more than a third say they never watched other Irish-language programmes on T.V.

In the Gaeltacht, more than two-thirds of the naíonra parents never read Irish papers or periodicals and more than half never read Irish books or Irish articles in English-language papers. More than one-third never read Irish story-books to their children and never listened to Raidió na Gaeltachta.

Parents living outside of the Gaeltacht were also asked if they had visited the Gaeltacht in the last 4 years, and 42% indicated that they had. Table 4.8 presents the results of their participation in Irish-language activities since their child began at a naíonra. The most significant difference, numerically, between the groups concerned the level of participation in Irish social activities, which, as might be expected, was almost three times higher in the Gaeltacht than in the Galltacht; over a third of Gaeltacht naíonra parents took part in Irish-medium social events, compared to less that one-third of

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[1] The cross-tabulated results showed that 57% of 'Irish only' homes listen to *Raidió na Gaeltachta* 'often', and another 23% 'regularly' (N=105), compared to only 17% each for 'English and Irish' homes (N=375).

Table 4.8 Parents' participation in Irish events since child began at naíonra

Since your child began at a naionra, have you participated in any of the following?	*Galltacht N=1354* %	*Gaeltacht N=425* %	*Overall N=1779* %
Irish language class	12	9	11
Irish-lang. social group/organisation	3	2	3
Irish-lang. social events (e.g. quiz etc.)	14	38	19
Irish cultural activities (e.g. dancing)	17	21	18

Galltacht naíonra parents. Overall, 11% reported that they had attended an Irish class since their child began at a naíonra, 3% said they had participated in an Irish language organisation, and 18% said they had taken part in Irish cultural activities. Regarding Irish classes, it is likely that a course which included the register and vocabulary needed for talking to young children (with advice on activities such as how to read story-books in Irish) would be most effective and satisfying for naionra parents. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

4.6 LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE NAÍONRA

Since research shows that the role of parents in pre-school education and in early immersion is central, it was considered important to ascertain how involved parents felt with the naíonra. Only 44% of respondents, and 15% of their partners, had attended an introductory meeting before their child began at the naíonra. This low turn-out is regrettable, since the introductory meeting provides valuable information on the approach adopted in the naionra and the importance of home support for the child's learning. Chapter 8 will look at some ways of increasing attendance at such meetings, as well as at other ways of disseminating this information to parents.

Regarding ongoing involvement, parents were asked about how often they and their partner engaged in a range of activities centred on the naíonra. Table 4.9 presents the reported involvement of respondents and their partners in naíonra-related activities; cross-tabulations by Galltacht/Gaeltacht showed only a small number of differences, which will be discussed below.

The most frequent contact for parents, particularly respondents (the majority of whom are mothers) is the necessary one of dropping off and collecting their young child (frequency categories are merged here for ease of reporting). After this, the majority of parents check on their child's progress and discuss the naíonra at home with their child at least monthly.

Only 6% of parents help in their naíonra regularly, and Gaeltacht respondents were three times more likely (9%) to do so at least weekly than Galltacht respondents (3%). Gaeltacht respondents were three times more likely to help with management or fund-raising at least every month (17%) than Galltacht parents (6%).

Finally, almost 80% of respondents and 90% of their partners reported that they 'rarely' or 'never' used naíonra books or tapes at home. It is not clear whether this is because they are unaware of what is available, or are unable or unwilling to use them. This will be discussed further in relation to parents' requirements below.

Table 4.9 Participation in naíonra-related activities

	% Self (N=1779)		*% Partner (N=1648)*	
How often do you engage in the following?	*At least Monthly*	*Rarely/ Never*	*At least Monthly*	*Rarely/ Never*
Dropping and collecting child	87	13	48	52
Checking on child's progress	74	26	56	44
Discussing naíonra with child	87	13	74	16
Home use of naionra books/tapes	20	80	13	77
Attending dramas/outings	12	87	6	94
Management/fund-raising	8	92	3	97
Helping in naíonra	6	94	1	99

Respondents indicated that in their contact with the naíonra, a minority (13%) spoke Irish only, half spoke Irish and English, and over a third (37%) spoke English only. This level of Irish use matches quite well with parents' report of their Irish ability in Chapter 3.

60% of parents reported that they were satisfied with their overall level of involvement with the naíonra, but 39% said they felt it was too low. Of the latter, 40% cited insufficient Irish as one reason for their low level of involvement, but practical considerations play the major role, since 75% indicated that it was their domestic or work arrangement which most depressed their involvement. Only 2% said they were not more actively involved because they felt unwelcome.

4.7 PARENTS' REQUIREMENTS

Parents were asked about the information the naionra provides for them, and asked which services they would find helpful. There were very few differences between Galltacht and Gaeltacht parents with regard to the services or help offered to them and their requirements. Table 4.10 indicates that almost half of the respondents wanted copies of the rhymes and songs the children learned in the naíonra, although another quarter said they already had these supplied. Between 30-40% wanted samples of the phrases learned, and help in using Irish at home. While there is some help already available in the form of a booklet of Irish words and phrases for parents of naíonra children (Basic Irish for Parents, Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann agus An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, 1989), and in the form of posters, books and tapes (An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, Catalóg) they appear not to be aware of this. Thus, it is important that the aids already available should be brought to parents' attention, ideally with some discussion at a parents' evening on how best to use them. Recommendations regarding marketing of the materials currently available for pre-school children in Irish are included in Chapter 8.

Dissemination of a video to parents showing scenes from a typical naíonra might also be worth considering (copies of this could be made available to each naíonra for parents to borrow). This could illustrate children using common phrases such as *cuirfidh mé orm mo chóta* and *tá ocras orm, is liomsa é* etc., with information on the video about the value of practising Irish with their child and suggestions for using such phrases naturally at home.

Table 4.10 Services provided by naíonra to parents - or services requested

N=1779	*% 'Already Provided*	*% 'I would like this'*
Copies of rhymes/songs	25	48
Samples of phrases learned	37	40
Help on using Irish at home	20	32
Parent & Toddler group	3	31
Help with selecting Irish books/tapes	22	30
Regular information on activities	54	24
Social events for parents in Irish	9	20
Irish conversation group for parents	8	19
Irish class/information on Irish classes	22	18

Almost a third of respondents in both Galltacht and Gaeltacht areas would like to attend an Irish-speaking 'Parent and Toddler' group, constituting half of the respondents with child(ren) younger than the naíonra child. Almost a third of parents would like help with selecting Irish books and tapes, and difficulties in the choice of such materials may contribute to their infrequent use in the home, as reported in the previous table. These issues will be discussed further below in Sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2.

4.7.1 Parent and Toddler Groups in Irish

The advantages of an ancillary service which would provide some experience of an Irish-language environment even before the naíonraí have been discussed in *Seal le Chéile* (Bord na Gaeilge, no author given) a document describing a pilot programme organised by Bord na Gaeilge in 1992. This programme, and the longer and wider experience of the *Kohanga reo* (Maori groups in New Zealand) and *'Cylch Mam a'i Phlentyn'* in Wales, have illustrated the benefits of offering parents and children an opportunity to learn and speak a second language at a very young age, before they are even aware that what they are hearing is another language. Ó Riagáin and Ó Gliasáin's (1979) study of all-Irish schools in Dublin is also pertinent here. They argued that establishing Irish use in the home is easier earlier rather than later in the family cycle. In Wales there is provision for children under two and a half years to participate with their parents in groups called *'Cylch Ti a Fi'*, and children over two and a half years are involved in *'Cylch Meithrin'* groups. In the former ('Welsh for the Family'), bilingual leaflets are provided, with suggested activities for the groups, but also with aims for Welsh use at home (e.g. 'Sing several [Welsh] songs with your child every day. Read at least one Welsh story with your child every day). Dr. Anne Brooke reports (personal communication, May 1995) that over 400 such groups now exist in Wales, catering for children up to about two and a half years, and the aim is to have one for each Welsh-medium play-group, about 600 in all. The Welsh Family Project has now received a grant from the Welsh Language Board to fund organisers to assist with the expansion of these groups.

Allowing parents to remain with their toddlers ensures that children feel supported and relaxed, and involves parents directly in the child's learning, thus promoting use of the language at home also. Parents are given an opportunity to improve their own Irish through conversation with other adults and through the learning of specific vocabulary.

However, it should be noted in this regard that the majority of Stiúrthóirí (60%) indicated that they were unwilling to start such Parent and Toddler groups, while only 18% expressed interest (there was a non-response rate of 22% on this question to Stiúrthóirí). Presumably this indicates that Stiúrthóirí feel that they are already fully occupied running their naíonraí. Thus, parents may need to be helped to organise such groups themselves. The location of a suitable venue (hall, room in a school) presents the major difficulty, but if it were possible for Stiúrthóirí or An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta to locate suitable venues near naíonraí for some such groups, parents might be induced to form self-sufficient committees to handle the running of the group.

An alternative, workable model for the provision of such Parent and Toddler groups comes from Ballinteer in Dublin, where a group of parents founded a co-operative movement called *Na Mamailínigh*. (A similar scheme is also operated by *Muintearas* in Connemara.) Small groups of no more than six parents and their children meet in each other's homes once a week for about two hours, and engage in activities such as painting, water-play, reading/telling stories, playing games, singing songs etc. through Irish. No special premises are required, and typically normal household insurance cover is deemed sufficient, provided that it is not a profit-making enterprise, but rather a social visit rather like a birthday party. Thus, such groups are an option for any small group of parents who are willing to organise themselves. Children attending can be aged from several months only up to about three years, and the Welsh experience has shown that these groups are very effective at promoting language learning at this age. Such young children, who feel happy and safe while with their parent present, are extremely accomplished learners with few inhibitions about producing what they know and adding to it. After a period in such a group a child can begin attending a naíonra already with some comprehension of Irish, and a knowledge of phrases songs and rhymes, which increases the level of Irish use in the naíonra and provides a most effective model for other children who have not been exposed to Irish.

For such groups to be maximally effective it is necessary that parents and local organisers be provided with suitable guidelines regarding the principles of the approach and suggestions for activities. A 'starter pack' along the lines of the Welsh Family Project materials would greatly assist with the expansion of such groups, and allow them to be more effective than if simply working alone. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta is currently investigating the provision of support to such Parent and Toddler groups.

4.8 CONCLUSIONS

Parents who choose to send their child to a naíonra base their decision on a range of factors, some of which relate to language learning, and some to general or educational factors. They evince a high level of satisfaction with their choice and are satisfied that their child has made significant progress, not only in Irish, but in general development also. Overall, the majority of children in both Galltacht and Gaeltacht naíonraí are from English-speaking homes, but parents reported significant increases in their home use of Irish after their child began attending the naíonra. Parents are generally satisfied with their level of involvement in the naíonra, and tend in the main to be 'door-step' visitors rather than participants in the naíonraí, but there is scope for informing them more of the language and activities used in the naíonra, and encouraging them to extend Irish use into the home. The indications of interest in Parent and Toddler groups among this population (about half of those with children younger than the child in the naíonra said they would like such a group in their area) point to another area of development for the naíonra movement.

Chapter 5

Survey of Stiúrthóirí

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The role of the Stiúrthóir is a demanding one. As outlined by Ó Murchú (1985:46), the ideal Stiúrthóir has native-speaker-like competence in Irish, and a range of other characteristics such as: an open personality, patience, a sense of humour, sensitivity with strength, diligence, practicality, good health, and good interpersonal skills. Sylva *et al.* (1980:225) agree that personality traits such as warmth, zestfulness, a fondness for talking with and listening to children and sharing in their play are important, and to these they add their observation that the best practitioners in their study had a self-confidence that allowed them to be aware of their limitations and willing to learn to improve any deficiencies. However, they point out that suitable personality traits are necessary but not sufficient for the ideal practitioner, since they must be allied with challenging materials, exciting activities and well-planned routine. To prepare for this role Stiúrthóirí need high quality pre-service and in-service training (Ó Murchú 1985). Snow (1987) comments that immersion teaching involves more than simply taking the standard curriculum and teaching it in another language, and therefore it is imperative that those involved in immersion education be adequately prepared and trained. Some of these requirements and issues are discussed in this chapter.

Section 5.2 presents data on the naíonraí, supplied by the Stiúrthóirí themselves. Section 5.3 details the qualifications, experience and Irish competence of the Stiúrthóirí. Section 5.4 examines the range of activities offered in naíonraí. Section 5.5 looks at the organisation of work in the naíonra and Section 5.6 discusses in-service training and the types of courses desired. Section 5.7 looks at the more general types of help which Stiúrthóirí indicate would be most beneficial. Section 5.8 details an assessment of the naíonraí by Comhairleoirí.

A questionnaire was sent to the 167 Stiúrthóirí covered by the naíonra Census. The response was excellent, with 162, or 97% returning the questionnaire. This can be taken as an indication of the high level of commitment of these Stiúrthóirí and their willingness to make their views known. They supplied data regarding the naíonra itself (such as its type of venue and fees), about themselves (such as their qualifications and experience), their methods and requirements, and their contact with parents and with schools in their neighbourhood.

5.2 NAÍONRAÍ

Egan (1981) found that the type of venue in which a naíonra was held had a significant effect on children's scores on a test of Irish production. The comparison of the Census results with Egan's (1981) sample of 20 test naíonraí regarding the distribution across venues shows that in 1993 a slightly smaller proportion (28%) of naíonra sessions were located in private homes than in Egan's study (31%), slightly more naíonraí were located in schools (25% compared to 20% in Egan's data) and the remainder were located in halls and other public buildings.

The results of the children's tests presented in Chapter 7 (Section 7.5.7) will show that the location of the naíonra did exert a significant influence on children's production scores. The effect of location will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Egan's study also found that the permanence of the naíonra was a significant variable in predicting children's Irish test results. Some naíonraí must remove all equipment and pictures etc. at the end of each session because the venue is used for other purposes. Sylva (1995, Dublin public lecture) commented that, in her experience of evaluating pre-schools and play-groups, having to clean up each morning after the activities of other groups the night before, having to remove all evidence of a play-group each day, and having no opportunity to hang children's equipment and art work on the walls seriously affected the quality of the children's experience in that setting. In this survey, as many as 20% of Stiúrthóirí in 1993 had to remove their equipment every day, and another 8% had to do so every few days. The influence of this factor on the test children's scores is investigated in Chapter 7.

5.2.1 Fees and Subsidies

Analysis of fees and subsidies was undertaken using data supplied by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, supplemented by information supplied by Stiúrthóirí themselves. The records of An Comhchoiste show that about one-third of naíonraí receive a subsidy from Údarás na Gaeltachta. Information from Stiúrthóirí suggests that a somewhat higher proportion (43%) receive some form of subsidy, either from Údarás, or from other bodies, such as regional health boards or Conradh na Gaeilge (in the form of rent-free accommodation or insurance subsidy).

Most naíonraí (about 80%) quote fees on a weekly basis, with a further 14% quoting fees on a monthly basis; the remaining 6% about equally quote rates per day or per term. Converting all these figures to a weekly basis shows that fees charged to parents ranged from £2 to £12.50 per child per week. The average fee was about £7 per child per week. There were, however, significant differences in fees charged by those operating with and without the subsidy from Údarás na Gaeltachta, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Naíonra fees

Weekly charge	*% Without Údarás subsidy*	*% With Údarás subsidy*	*All %*
£2 up to £5	6.5	78.0	29.1
£5 up to £10	84.3	22.0	64.6
£10 to £12.50	9.3	0.0	6.3
All	100.0	100.0	100.0

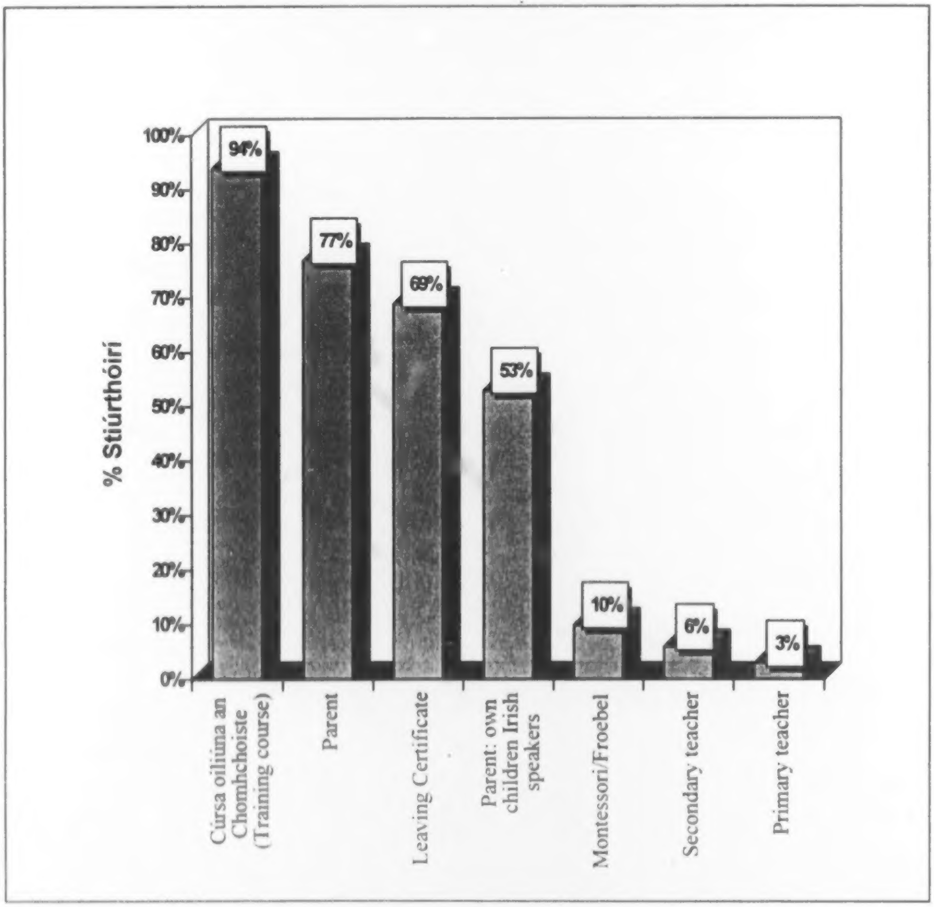
Almost 80% of naíonraí operating with the subsidy had fees of less than £5 per child per week, with none having fees of over £10 per week. By contrast, more than 90% of those operating without a subsidy had fees of £5 per week or more, with about 10% having fees of over £10 per week. The average fee for naíonraí operating with the subsidy was about £5 per week, as against an average of about £8 per week for those operating without a subsidy. These figures appear to be roughly in line with the average fee for play-groups (IPPA, personal communication, August 1996), but lower than many Montessori pre-schools, which charge up to about £20 per week. The issue of fees and subsidies will be considered more generally in Chapter 8.

5.3 STIÚRTHÓIRÍ

5.3.1 Qualifications

Stiúrthóirí were asked to select which of a list of qualifications applied to them (more than one could be selected). Figure 5.1 presents these results. The importance of training for pre-school educators has long been recognised (see Ó Murchú 1985 and Goutard 1980 for a discussion). The intensive preparatory course offered by An Comhchoiste is compulsory for all intending Stiúrthóirí, but its take-up as reported by this group is less than 100% because some Stiúrthóirí were running naíonraí before the course became available. This course is currently in two parts: the first part is of one week's duration, full-time, and takes place in the Spring of each year. The second part is a two-day (weekend) course which is held in the following autumn. The course comprises a basic introduction to pre-school education and deals in particular with second language acquisition. There was an attendance of 46 at the course in 1992 and 57 in 1993. In addition to the course itself, Comhairleoirí organise a practicum for trainee Stiúrthóirí attending the preparatory course. The length of this work practice varies between organisers, from one day up to 2 weeks duration, and can be in one or in several naíonraí. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, through its Comhairleoirí, also offers a number of in-service courses to practising Stiúrthóirí. These are discussed in Section 5.6.

Figure 5.1 Qualifications of Stiúrthóirí



Apart from skills acquired on such courses, Stiúrthóirí bring a range of skills to the naíonraí. Most Stiúrthóirí (77%) also have personal experience of children of their own, which can be expected to contribute to their skills in interacting with, and supervising young children. Over half of the Stiúrthóirí reported that they had raised their children as Irish speakers; this figure may cover both those who spoke Irish exclusively to their children, and those who used both English and Irish to their children. Even if there was not exclusive use of with their own children, they would nevertheless have gained experience in the use of this particular register of Irish with young children. However, as INTO (1995) points out, experience gained from parenting is not sufficient training for early childhood educators, for whom specialist training is essential. About a sixth of Stiúrthóirí have professional teaching qualifications (including Montessori and Froebel qualifications) though only those with the latter types of qualification would have specialist training in dealing with pre-school children. When invited to state whether they had any other qualifications, 5% reported that they were nurses and about 10% reported that they had also completed Irish Pre-school Playgroup Association (IPPA) courses.

Clearly, the training course run by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta is of crucial importance in preparing Stiúrthóirí, since this is the most specialised, or the only training received by the vast majority of Stiúrthóirí. Ó Murchú (1985), referring to the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Pre-school Training suggested that a full-time one-year course is necessary for student Stiúrthóirí. She recommended that such a course include basic linguistic training, including sections on first language acquisition and bilingualism, with training in methodology arising from them. She saw the value of making this a general course aimed at all those intending to work with pre-school children, with particular parts directed at those wishing to work in naíonraí.

A general course does now exist, offered by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), leading to a Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education. This is a two-year full-time course, and graduates can proceed to an in-service part-time Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education qualification. Such fully recognised pre-service and in-service training in this field is a very positive development. The National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) also offers modules in Early Childhood Education and Child Development (in Marino College of Education) as part of their Community and Health Services Childcare (Level 2) Award. The advent of recognised qualifications is most welcome in providing more comprehensive training for childcare workers, and such qualifications will, in turn, lead to an improvement in the services to children and, hopefully, to the status of workers in this field.

However, neither the DIT or NCVA courses deal with early immersion pre-schooling. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta reports that it is currently investigating the possibility of gaining recognition from the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) or the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) for its pre-service course through the medium of Irish. Such certification and the expansion of the pre-service course to cover more material on child development and pedagogy would undoubtedly enhance the skills and status of naíonra leaders. However, it is essential that the particular requirements of immersion pre-schooling be considered in relation to every aspect of the preparatory training for Stiúrthóirí, rather than as a single additional course, since, without such a bottom-up approach, immersion pre-schooling will be less effective (Snow 1987). It is also important that courses in Irish and in the teaching of Irish as a first and second language, plus a residential stay in the Gaeltacht, should be included in the training for Stiúrthóirí, given the importance of establishing high levels of Irish competence. These issues regarding training and Irish ability will be considered further in Section 5.4 in relation to the organisation of activities in the naíonra. Other issues concerning training and recognition of experience are discussed in Chapter 8.

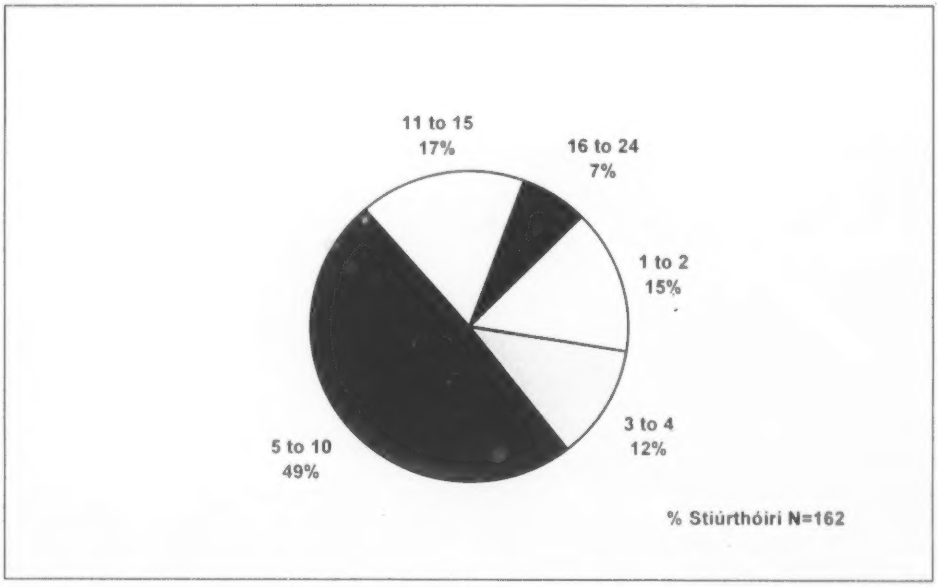
Recent proposals (INTO, 1995) for the training of primary teachers involved in early education are also relevant here. The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1995:157) recommends that the content and structures of primary teacher education be reviewed, that postgraduate certification in early education be instituted and that the Department of Education should fund in-service courses on early education. Only 22% of respondents to an INTO survey in 1995 of Junior Infants teachers reported that they had specialised to some degree in infant/early education, while 39% felt that their pre-service training did not prepare them adequately for infant teaching.

Clearly, many of those working with young children, both in and outside of the State system, would benefit from further specialised training and certification. It would appear that developments in pre-service and in-service training for all those working in early education are needed, and would improve the service provided to children.

5.3.2 Experience

Stiúrthóirí were asked to indicate how many years they had been running a naíonra. The results are summarised in Fig. 5.2.

Fig. 5.2 Stiúrthóirí: Experience in years



Almost half of Stiúrthóirí have between 5 and 10 years' experience in running a naíonra, and 24% have more than 10 years' experience, representing a significant pool of experience. This indicates that the level of attrition among Stiúrthóirí is fairly low, with 73% continuing for at least as long as 5 years. Thus, it would appear that investment in training Stiúrthóirí would be rewarded, since there is a reasonably low turnover in personnel and evidence of commitment to this occupation.

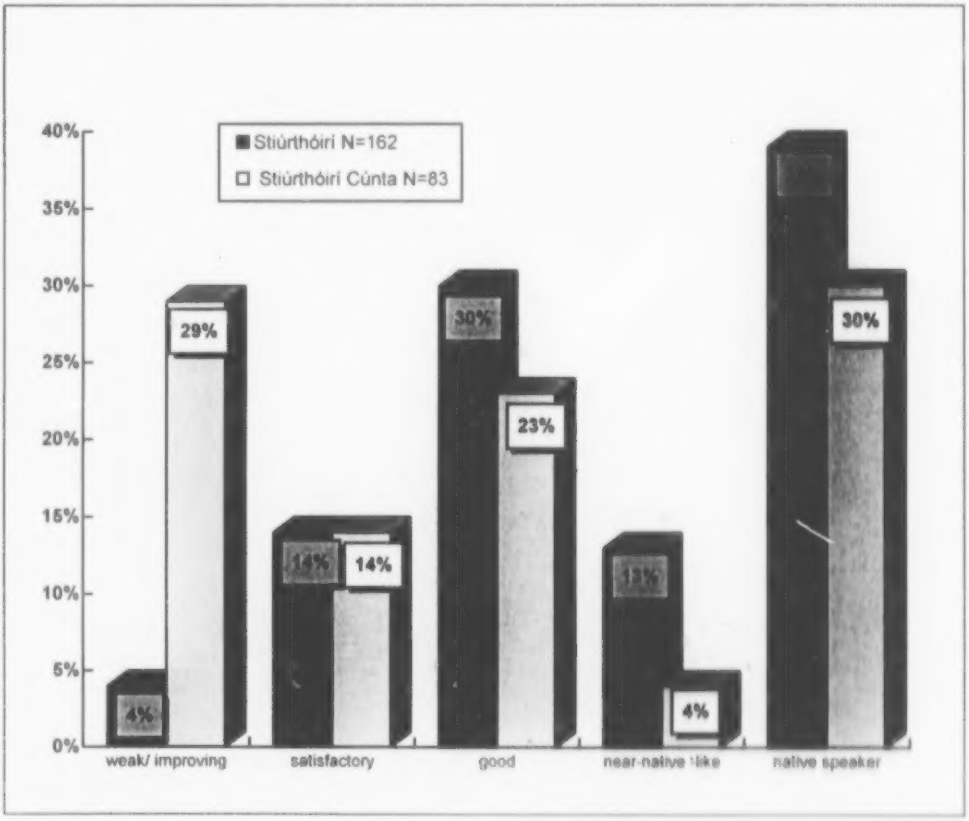
At present the majority of Stiúrthóirí see little professional advancement, with only a very small number becoming Comhairleoirí or contributing to executive committees. The establishment of a 'Sár-Stiúrthóir' rank might be considered for experienced Stiúrthóirí, possibly linked with qualifications such as the Certificate and Diploma in Child-Care. This would allow those who have a certain number of years' experience and have, in addition, attained further qualifications, to achieve some recognition within the naíonra system of their professional advancement. Such a grade could also facilitate pairing arrangements between new Stiúrthóirí and 'Sár-Stiúrthóirí' within an area, to allow the skills of the latter to be made available to newcomers in an informal mentor-type relationship.

5.3.3 Irish Competence and Input

As part of the profile of the Stiúrthóirí, the ratings of the Comhairleoirí of the Irish competence of each Stiúrthóir and Stiúrthóir Cúnta in her area are given in Figure 5.3. Over half of Stiúrthóirí have native speaker or native speaker-like competence in Irish. Another 30% are rated as having 'good' competence. However, 18% of Stiúrthóirí and as many as 44% of Stiúrthóirí Cúnta have lower levels of competence. There is evidence in the analysis of the children's test scores (Chapter 7) that children with Stiúrthóirí who have Irish rated as satisfactory ('sásúil') or weak ('lag') tend to perform less well on Irish production, as measured by the test. This points to the importance of ensuring that all Stiúrthóirí and their assistants have an adequate level of Irish competence, through the targeting of appropriate Irish language training on this group. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The level of Irish competence among Stiúrthóirí inevitably influences the type and amount of Irish input children receive in the naíonra. While the question of the importance of input remains a controversial one in second language acquisition, Ellis (1994) pointed out that all theories of L2 acquisition acknowledge the need for input. Long (1985) detailed how speakers adjust their input to L2 learners, in order to make it comprehensible and appropriate and claimed that these adjustments, such as greater regularity and context-dependence, more repetition and expansion, restricted vocabulary and more use of questions, positively influence acquisition. A number of similarities have been noted between 'teacher talk' (Chaudron 1988) and speech directed at young children acquiring their first language. Hatch (1983) found that the latter is pitched higher, louder and slower, thereby directing the child's attention to it. Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1982) and Chaudron (1988) noted that speech directed at young L2 learners is simpler, slower, more correct and more redundant than speech directed at other adults, with more repetition and other interactional modifications as well. Krashen (1985) stressed the centrality of such comprehensible input, based on context and current activities, leading to interaction, which in turn provides more (appropriate) input, leading

Figure 5.3 Stiúrthóirí and assistants: Irish competence



to output and learning by the L2 learner. Devitt (1989) and Wagner Gough (1975) explored the way in which children learning a second language build parts of the input into their own output in the early stages of acquisition. Ó Murchú (1985) also emphasised the importance of input in the naíonra, stating children's need to hear Irish input '*de shíor*' (continuously). It is reasonable to assume that Stiúrthóirí who have weaker levels of competence would be less able to provide the appropriate and accurate input required to optimise L2 acquisition.

Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1982) found that the younger subjects (aged 3-5 years, attending kindergarten) in their sample appeared to be more dependent on hearing L2 speech directed specifically at them in the classroom than older learners. They observed that in kindergarten classes which had frequent individual and small group activity and resulting high noise levels, relatively few utterances directed at L2 learners in one group were comprehensible to those in another. They noted (p. 425) that those kindergartners who received the fewest directly addressed utterances made little progress in acquiring the L2.

There is some debate among researchers (e.g. Swain 1985, Day, 1985) about the relationship between the amount and directedness of L2 input and L2 learning. Some of the doubts about this relationship may be more pertinent to older L2 learners, but it is of interest to note Swain's claim that input alone is insufficient, and that immersion pupils need to be given ample opportunities to produce comprehensible *output* also, in order to focus their attention on aspects of the language they hear in input, in addition to being pushed towards comprehensibility and accuracy in later grades. Despite the fact that input alone is insufficient to bring about L2 acquisition, its necessity is accepted, and it is widely acknowledged that comprehensible, context-based input plays a critical role in L2 acquisition, particularly for very young learners. However, it is important to note Kleifgen's (1985) warning that, while input is a necessary condition for second language acquisition, it needs to be understood not just as simplified input, but as the negotiation of mutual understanding between participants.

To maximise such appropriate Irish input in the naíonra and to facilitate and respond optimally to learners' early attempts at comprehensible output, it is likely that Stiúrthóirí need to have at least good fluency in the language. Only this level of fluency is likely to allow the necessary modifications, such as the need for a high degree of regularity in the language used, the importance of repetition with variation, and language 'scaffolding'. Such modifications were, in fact, noted by Mhic Mhathúna (1993:188) in her study of two naíonraí in which the Stiúrthóirí had good fluency. For Stiúrthóirí dealing with a group which has a range of Irish ability, Kleifgen (1985:59) noted the importance of being able to adapt the input and interactional adjustments to individual children's degree of proficiency. The fact that 82% of Stiúrthóirí were considered to have at least good fluency is very positive. However, it would appear to be a high priority to raise the Irish competence of the remaining 18% of Stiúrthóirí and the 44% of Stiúrthóirí Cúnta who have lower levels of Irish fluency. Unless each of the adults in the naíonra is capable of providing optimal Irish input to the children, then larger groups will be at a disadvantage, despite their seemingly acceptable pupil-teacher ratio. The language input issue will be discussed further below with regard to the range of activities offered, and later in relation to the test results in Chapter 7.

5.4 RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

Stiúrthóiri were asked about the range of activities they provide regularly in the naíonra. The list of activities provided was selected by experienced naíonra personnel. Table 5.2 presents the results. Over 80% of respondents reported that in the final term the average child plays in the home corner, does jigsaws and plays with blocks every day. Douglas (1993) also found these activities to be available and used with high frequency in most of his sample of 12 community play-groups and 22 home play-groups in the Republic of Ireland.

Stiúrthóirí were also asked to indicate which of these activities they would rate as among their five most effective activities for promoting Irish in the naíonra. The five activities selected by the majority were: songs and rhymes (83%), story-telling (71%), home corner (58%) group games (45%) and card-matching (33%). However, as Table 5.2 shows, these activities did not always occur every day in naíonraí.

Table 5.2 Range and frequency of activities in the naíonraí

Cé chomh minic is a dhéanann an páiste ar an meán na gníomhaíochtaí seo i do naíonra sa téarma deireanach? (How often does the average child in your naíonra take part in the following activity in the last term?).

Activity	*Every day* %	*Once or twice a week* %	*< once a week* %	*Not done* %
Home corner	82	13	0	5
Jigsaws	80	19	1	1
Bricks & building materials	80	16	1	3
Songs & rhymes	67	32	0	1
Chalk & crayons	60	38	1	2
Painting	53	42	1	3
Sand	50	33	7	11
Story-telling	42	54	3	1
Group games	40	49	8	3
Card-matching	33	52	10	5
Dough	32	51	8	8
Water	24	53	12	11
Outdoor play	20	42	22	17
Use of scissors	18	55	18	9
Athletics	15	44	18	23
Clay	9	36	22	33
Drama	5	43	23	29
Puppets	1	30	40	28

More Stiúrthóirí selected rhymes and songs than any other activity as an effective means of promoting Irish in the naíonra, with 83% of them picking it as one of their five most effective activities. Materials from An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta emphasise the value of building rhymes and songs into other common daily activities such as hand-washing or eating (see, for example, Ní Ailpín 1985:20, Ó Murchú, 1985:43). Thus, it is somewhat surprising that these were not more frequent activities for all children, with only 67% reporting daily use by the average child, and 32% reporting use only once or twice a week.

It is possible that this relatively low use among some Stiúrthóirí may be an indication of the frequency only of more formal song or rhyme sessions, rather than informal presentation of an appropriate rhyme as a child is doing some activity. Research on informal second language learning among young children (e.g. Wong Fillmore 1976, Vesterbacka 1991, Mhic Mhathúna 1995) has shown the importance of formulas or phrases which are tied to a particular activity, and short rhymes and songs appear to be particularly good candidates, with built-in rhythm or a tune to aid memory. Ní Ailpín (1985), in *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí Naíonraí* (Handbook for Stiúrthóirí) points out that songs and rhymes can be tied to every activity of the naíonra and serve as a strong support for language learning, with rhythm, music, movement, meaning and pleasure contributing to the child's acquisition. Ó Murchú (1985:44) points to a further advantage of rhymes and songs in allowing frequent but meaningful exact repetition when tied to an activity, thus facilitating their take-up by the child. Peters (1983), Lightbown and d'Anglejan (1985), Hickey (1993) and Karniol (1990) argued that children in first and second language acquisition may more easily be able to decode or analyse the language components of such phrases after learning the entire phrase as a unit first, rather than trying to analyse completely new language items. Given these indications of the value of knitting rhymes and songs into as many naíonra activities as possible, some support and promotion of this concept might be beneficial for the group which reports fairly infrequent use of rhymes and songs.

However, it should be noted that Weber and Tardif's (1991) study sounded a warning about the efficacy of songs for language learning. They accepted that songs could be motivating and help comprehension and fluency as well as accent, but they found that phrases learned in songs did not transfer to spoken language, and this they attributed to the highly context-dependent nature of children's language use. Thus, it is important that phrases learned in songs especially, but also in rhymes, should be extended, with substitution of particular words, and used in a range of appropriate contexts rather than becoming fossilised.

Only two-fifths of Stiúrthóirí reported that the average child took part in group games every day. Hatch (1983) discussed the benefits for language learning of the ritualised responses or formulas required in games, which are repeated constantly and easily imitated. These correspond to the highly predictable contexts discussed by Wong Fillmore (1985), in which children are helped to make sense of the language heard through its regularity and its dependence on a familiar context. This also links to the research noted in relation to songs and rhymes on the importance of formulas for providing children with ready-made appropriate output in addition to data for later analysis. Mhic Mhathúna (1993) noted instances of children predicting the Stiúrthóir's next question when playing games, and this prediction was the more obvious because in some cases the Stiúrthóir in question 'broke the rules' by deviating from the regular pattern of questions. She found that children playing card games, for example, showed themselves to be able to construct comprehensible output in the form of two and three turns in Irish from the formulas they had learned to be appropriate for the game. Thus, the highly predictable sequences in games offer good opportunities for children to take the first steps into L2 production.

Only 42% of Stiúrthóirí reported that story-telling was an everyday activity for the average child in their group, although it occurred a couple of times a week for another 49%, and just once a week for 5%. Somewhat at odds with this relatively low frequency was the rating of story-telling as being among the most effective language teaching activities in the naíonra, with 71% of Stiúrthóirí selecting it as one of the five most important activities for promoting Irish in the naíonra. This disparity between the rating of storytelling and its actual use with each child may reflect organisational and practical difficulties where naíonra size is quite large, or where there is no assistant. However, research (for example Wells, 1985) has shown that reading aloud to pre-school children repays special effort, since it was the activity most strongly associated with their later reading achievement at age seven. Similarly, research which looked at the benefits of reading aloud in children's second language (for example Romney, Romney and Braun, 1989) showed that reading aloud for 30 minutes each day to seven-year-olds over a period of 3 months results in improved receptive vocabulary and ability to communicate in their L2 compared to a control group who were not read to. Romney *et al.* recommend that reading aloud should commence in the kindergarten in early immersion, and should ideally be carried out with small groups of children. Of course the attention span of three- and four-year-olds is likely to be considerably shorter than that of seven-year-olds, but, suitably adapted (with a high degree of dramatic liveliness in the telling, and with non-verbal support in the form of actions, facial signals and props where appropriate, as well as illustrations) story-telling is an extremely valuable activity in early immersion.[1]

While the range of books in Irish suitable for the three-year-old is not as large as that in English, it is nevertheless sufficient to allow for reading for short periods each day, either to the whole group, or to small groups. The number of books available is less important than their quality, since it is crucial that the same story be repeated frequently, allowing children time to benefit from their deductions regarding meaning, and to pay attention to the language once they comprehend the story, so that they can begin to play the role of some characters in the story by imitating short utterances which recur.

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[1] It is of interest to note here that while observation schedules such as that developed by Sylva *et al.* (1980), and used by Douglas (1993), M. Horgan (1987) and S. Horgan (1995), treat activities such as story-telling and the use of rhymes as being of 'inscrutable' levels of cognitive challenge, the INTO (1995) argues that this underestimates the importance of these activities. It notes, with regard to its survey of Junior Infant classes:

> That much valuable story-telling takes place in infant classrooms is undeniable, that it is accomplished successfully in whole class situations and that it contributes to linguistic and cognitive development needs to be acknowledged.
>
> INTO (1995:159)

The home corner[1] or *cúinne baile* is a very popular activity, with 82% respondents saying that children engaged in it every day, and a further 13% once or twice a week. This activity was the third most frequently selected activity for its effectiveness in language teaching, with 58% placing it among their top five language activities. This type of imaginative play has many benefits, such as promoting emotional and social development and increasing self-esteem and knowledge of the world. In addition, it allows children to use the language which they hear modelled to them, in the context of everyday activities, in an enjoyable context. However, unless an adult participates in home corner this activity is likely to result in high usage of English in the many naíonraí which have a majority of children from English-only backgrounds, since this open situation demands a productive ability which most naíonra children lack. It is of interest to note that Price (1968:50), in an early study of bilingual education for four-year-olds in Wales, listed 'house play' among activities *least* conducive to second language learning, for the reasons given above.

Children with low levels of Irish competence need to hear the maximum amount of Irish, providing them with comprehensible input in all of the contexts in which they engage. This points to the need to use home corner differently in the naíonra which has a majority of children from English-only homes, with the Stiúrthóir participating actively with a small group to model and elicit Irish use. The data gathered for this study do not provide detail on the level of involvement of Stiúrthóirí in home corner. This issue will be investigated further in relation to an observational study of 60 children (Hickey, in preparation). The example of home corner highlights the need for adaptation of the activities normally available in a pre-school or play-group to the requirements of the immersion situation. Thus, home corner is an activity which must be adapted in the naíonra if it is to promote use of Irish by the children as well as achieve its broader social and emotional objectives.

Only 31% of Stiúrthóirí reported that children engaged in activities with puppets at least once or twice a week, and 28% said they never used them[2]. Weber and Tardif (1991) found that they could use puppets in a French-immersion kindergarten in Canada to create a playful language situation that naturally invited children's participation and elicited language effectively from them. Children were told that the puppet was younger than they were, and very shy. Since the researchers were using the puppet for assessment they had it speak English, asking the child how to say particular things in French. However, this method could also prove effective even if the puppet were Irish-speaking, since children appear to treat puppets as peer interlocutors rather than as adults.

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[1] In home corner children can usually dress up, play with dolls and play, e.g., 'house' or 'shop'.

[2] However, as Table 5.5 shows, 57% of Stiúrthóirí reported that they wanted in-service training in the use of drama and puppets, indicating that they were unsure of how best to provide these activities.

Similarly, language rehearsal with dolls has been shown to be an important strategy in early second language acquisition (Karniol 1990), allowing children to take the role of adult to use some of the language which has been directed at them by adults in immersion. This may explain in part the attraction for children of the *cúinne baile* and the fact that Stiúrthóirí rate it as an effective language promoting activity, but clearly this activity must be monitored to adapt it to early second language learning.

It is interesting to compare the range of activities in daily use in the naíonraí with the data from the INTO (1995) survey of 295 teachers of Junior Infants classes in primary schools (in which children are usually aged between 4 and 5 years). This showed that jigsaws and building blocks were in daily use in just over half of those classes, while 'play house' and 'dressing up clothes' were available in less than a third, and used less frequently where available. In general, the INTO survey (1995:127) showed a higher use of books (67% daily usage), crayons (92%) and pencils (96%), pre-reading materials (56%) pre-mathematics materials (46%) and puppets (18%) and lower daily use of construction materials (57%), sand (26%) and water (18%). The commentary on that survey (p.128) points out that the frequency of usage of equipment is influenced by classroom organisation such as multi-grade classrooms and large class sizes. However, the equipment and activities provided also illustrate the different aims and curricula in operation. It is of great benefit that naíonraí provide experiences with materials which are less available in Junior Infants classes, but it is also important that these activities be accompanied by the maximum opportunities to hear and speak Irish.

5.4.1 Input, Interaction and Activities

Table 5.3 presents the mean rating by Stiúrthóirí of each activity for its effectiveness in promoting Irish, compared with the reported frequency of daily use for each activity. It shows that of the seven activities which could be classified as language-centred, only two were actually engaged in by more than half of the children on a daily basis. In contrast, of the eleven activities which could be classified as object- or activity-centred, five were engaged in each day by more than half of the children. Of course, the division into language- versus object-centred activities is something of an artificial one, since any activity can be used to promote language by skilled Stiúrthóirí. The naíonra handbook (*Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí*) stresses the need to link every activity with the maximum amount of relevant comprehensible input. However, it is certainly the case that in some activities, such as story-telling, language is more central to the whole activity. It is therefore of some concern that such activities do not occur more often for all children.

It is of interest to note that there are some parallels between Table 5.3 and Price's (1968) early study which divided activities into those which are most and least conducive to second language learning. One difference was in the rating of home corner, as already discussed. Also of interest was Price's observation that jigsaws, water, sand and doll play could be effective SLA activities when directed, but were ineffective when undirected. Price explained this as being the result of more predictable and context-dependent L2 input being supplied in the directed situations. Mhic Mhathúna (1993), in her observation of two naíonraí, asserted that the activities which elicited most talk from the children in general were: card-games, lunch-time and story-telling. She noted that, in her test naíonraí, there was relatively little talk while children were occupied with building or art materials, whereas these were activities which Sylva *et al.* (1980) found to promote talk between children and between children and adults.

Table 5.3 Mean rating for language-teaching effectiveness and reported daily use

'Language-centred'	*Rating %*	*Daily Use %*	*'Object/ Activity-centred'*	*Rating %*	*Daily Use %*
Songs & rhymes	84	67	Jigsaw	31	80
Story-telling	70	42	Paint	27	53
Home corner	58	82	Dough	24	32
Group games	46	40	Bricks	19	80
Card-matching	32	33	Crayon	15	60
Drama	26	5	Sand	14	50
Puppets	19	1	Outdoor play	14	20
			Water	12	24
			Athletics	10	15
			Clay	7	9
			Use of scissors	4	18

The issue of Irish input and interaction is central to the organisation of activities in the naíonraí. The naíonra handbook (*Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí)* states that Irish input should not take the form of a continuous monologue to silent children, but should instead allow for a high level of interaction between Stiúrthóir and children[1]. This emphasis on input and interaction in the immersion classroom supports observational studies of naíonraí (Mhic Mhathúna 1993 and Hickey, in preparation) which suggest that the level of child-adult interaction in naíonraí may be higher than in the pre-schools in Britain observed by Sylva *et al.* (1980), in which children spent only 5% of their time in dialogue with an adult, and a further 15% with other children. Douglas (1993) found similarly low levels of talk in the mother-tongue pre-schools he studied in Ireland.

While this study does not set out to measure input and interaction in the naíonraí, some indications can be seen in data from Comhairleoirí (presented in Tables 5.10 and 5.11 later in this chapter) which show that they judged that a quarter of Stiúrthóirí achieved

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[1] It is of interest in this regard to note that S. Horgan's (1995) observational study of 50 children in 5 Junior Infants classes in Irish-medium primary schools showed that they spoke to their teacher on average three times more often than the sample of children in English-medium classes observed by M. Horgan 1987) or Montessori play-groups observed by Dunlea (1990) (See INTO 1995:71).

'excellent' use of Irish in interacting with the children, and a further 52% were considered 'good'. Fewer Stiúrthóirí (14%) were considered to be 'excellent' in their reinforcement of language through activities, and 41% were 'good'. Conversely, however, Comhairleoirí reported that almost a tenth of Stiúrthóirí had, at best, 'weak' Irish in interaction with the children, and up to a fifth were, at best, 'weak' in their use of activities to reinforce language acquisition. The reports on the use of Irish with children by Stiúrthóirí Cúnta were lower, with a fifth being, at best, 'weak'. Thus, there is a clear need to improve the Irish competence of those Stiúrthóirí and Stiúrthóirí Cúnta, and to facilitate their provision of Irish input, interaction and reinforcement. In addition there is a need to plan and adapt activities and teaching styles, with the twin aims of fostering general development and promoting Irish acquisition. These issues will require detailed consideration in future training.

5.4.2 Classroom Organisation

Wong Fillmore (1982, 1985) noted, in her study of 30 classes in the U.S. (ranging from Kindergarten to grade 5), that the more structured classes, which often involved group activities in which the teacher participated, were more successful in terms of L2 learning than unstructured ones based on individual play. Wong Fillmore attributed this to the children's dependence on the teacher as the sole source of input in the L2, which meant that children who were less accomplished at getting the teacher's attention in the unstructured class (which had heavy use of solo activity) simply did not receive much L2 input. She found that a compromise between a structured approach, using some group work and some individual work appeared to be most successful, in conjunction with activities which provided the most appropriate and regular input. Wong Fillmore found that the most successful language-teaching exercises gave as many as possible the chance to pick up input from the teacher, their L2 model, and to produce output in the L2 in interaction with her. Classes organised mainly around individual work provided fewer chances for either L2 input or output. Wong Fillmore found that organising children in groups facilitated L2 acquisition through increasing comprehensible input to them. A further disadvantage of individual and group work in which the teacher does not participate was noted by Hirvonen (1985), who showed that it invariably resulted in children using their L1 rather than the target language.

Saville-Troike (1983) claimed that small groups were the most likely setting for providing the greatest quantity and quality of personalised L2 teacher input. Mhic Mhathúna (1995) also noted, in her study of two naíonraí, that the majority of children received most appropriate input when interacting in small groups with the Stiúrthóir. However, not only was the *amount* of language input critical, but also the *way* in which the language was used in that input. She found that activities which worked well for language learning were quite formal and scheduled, with clear boundaries. This meant that, over time, children learned what to expect regarding the format of this activity, and learned the rather formulaic, consistent language which accompanied it. Such consistency of format, as already discussed in relation to games and rhymes, helps children's comprehension by orienting them to the task, and allows them to direct their attention fully to the new items or material being presented. Wong Fillmore (1985:38) noted that the teachers in the successful kindergarten classes in her study not only made repeated use of familiar language patterns and routines, but included high levels of repetition with minor modification. Such repetition with variation is emphasised in the training of Stiúrthóirí and their Handbook, and is built into the songs and rhymes recommended for frequent use by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, such as:

> *Bainfidh mé díom mo hata x 3* (I will take off my hat) - on arrival at naíonra
> *tra la la la la la la*
> *Bainfidh mé díom mo chóta x 3* (I will take off my coat)
> *tra la la la la la la*
>
> *Cuirfidh mé orm mo hata x 3* (I will put on my hat) - at going home time
> *tra la la la la la la*
> *Cuirfidh mé orm mo chóta x 3* (I will put on my coat)
> *tra la la la la la la*

Substitutions in familiar sentence frames seem to alert learners to word boundaries and word classes, helping them to learn what types of words can be substituted within phrases they already know. Overall, Wong Fillmore found that the teachers of the most successful classes in her study used language which was rich and sometimes playful, with well-contextualised expanded vocabulary, and with rhymes and songs to illustrate particular linguistic points. This is in line with the approach advocated in the naíonra handbook (*Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí*) but it is likely that only Stiúrthóirí with at least good fluency in Irish and adequate training in L2 teaching skills would be able to put this into practice with ease. As Table 5.10 will show later in this chapter, while Comhairleoirí rated more than three-quarters of Stiúrthóirí as 'good' or 'excellent' at presenting Irish in a way that facilitated its acquisition, almost a quarter of Stiúrthóirí (24%), and more than half of their Assistants were at best 'satisfactory' in their use of Irish with children.

Wong Fillmore (1991) stressed the importance of taking into account the language balance within a particular group. She argued that, where the majority of children speak a language other than the target language to each other (as was the case in the majority of naíonraí in this study and in Mhic Mhathúna's 1993 study of two naíonraí), there is a need to maximise the input to them from the teacher, through more verbal interaction between the teacher and the children, and, in the naíonra context, with some more group activities such as story-telling, games, singing and morning and lunch-time discussions. On the other hand, she observed that a group which has sufficient competence in the target language to use it among themselves may have a different balance between group and individual activities. Such a group is also more likely to be able to play in the home corner independently of the Stiúrthóir than a group with very low competence in Irish. Thus, the mix of children's ability in Irish must be taken into account in organising activities and in striving to achieve optimal levels of Irish input.

The range of activities provided each day in naíonraí shows the range of skills which are being promoted, and the commitment to fostering children's overall development as well as purely linguistic skills. Thus, play with bricks, jigsaws, sand, water, paint and dough provides important experience of different textures and substances, allowing stimulating solitary exploration, imaginative play and the development of basic number skills at different stages. However, given the naíonra context, it is important that the linguistic element in every activity should also be highlighted, by providing children with the simple vocabulary they need to comment on their actions. Naíonraí should not be expected to do everything that is done in mother-tongue pre-schools or play-groups in exactly the same way, as though the use of what is a second language for the majority of children as a medium were merely one additional factor added to mother-tongue pre-schooling. Instead, the methodology and balance of activities needs to reflect the twin aims of fostering children's overall development *and* their acquisition of Irish as L2 or L1, with the Stiúrthóir in the majority of cases acting as the sole speaker of Irish in the child's daily life. Thus, the methodology used in non-immersion play-groups needs to be re-assessed in the immersion situation, in order to maximise target-language input and interaction, with a compromise, as in the Wong Fillmore study, between child-centred activities and teacher-led ones with small or large groups, which allow Irish input to be offered to as many children as possible in the context. What is needed is a re-evaluation of the balance between the types of activities engaged in by children each day, with a good representation of language-centred activities. It is also necessary to ensure that, when children are engaged in more object-centred activities, they nevertheless receive ample Irish input and opportunities to interact with the Stiúrthóir.

It is important that this should not be interpreted as a call for a formal 'teaching' approach, and in this regard the High/Scope approach is relevant to Irish early immersion. Nabuco and Sylva (1995) compared children in three pre-school settings in Portugal: a High/Scope pre-school, a Formal Skills pre-school and an unstructured play-group. They found that children in the High/Scope approach had a balance of free and guided choice, while those in the formal approach had no choice and those in the unstructured play-group had almost unlimited choice. Children in the High/Scope setting spent only about 10% of their time working alone, with about half of their time in small group work and the remainder in larger groups, engaged in stories, rhymes and songs; children in the Formal Skills setting spent about the same amount of time in adult-led groups, but engaged in school-like activities, and the children in the unstructured setting spent most of their time playing alone or in pairs. Adults in the High/Scope setting were judged to *extend* children's activities, whereas those in the Formal skills setting *taught* and those in the unstructured group *cared for and helped* children. The Nabuco and Sylva evaluation (in a follow-up nine months after leaving pre-school) showed that the High/Scope children showed a subsequent superiority in reading and writing and a greater sense of their own competence and likeability, whereas children from the Formal Skills approach did less well on reading and felt less positively about their competence and likeability, and the children from the unstructured approach did less well on reading and writing, though they felt quite positively about themselves.

Brown (1990) and O'Flaherty (1995) describe the High/Scope approach as having the following routine: circle time, planning work, working, clean-up time, reviewing and small-group time. O' Flaherty (1995) notes the stress on a consistent daily routine, with circle time as an important part of that routine, when the whole group of children and adult(s) sing together, take part in action songs, move to music, play games, listen to stories and discuss upcoming events. Children may plan and carry out work either alone or in pairs or small groups. Reviewing work may be done by individual children with an adult, or by small groups of five to eight children plus an adult, with children recalling and reviewing their activities, often during their snack. Thus, Browne shows that a full range of teaching styles is required, and the ability to manage various groupings from individual work, pairs, small groups and whole class.

What makes the High/Scope approach particularly relevant to early immersion is its emphasis on the need for talk about every activity, including clean-up time and outdoor play, just as is stressed in the naíonra handbook (*Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí*) and in pre-service training for Stiúrthóirí. For example, at circle time children develop skills in talking and listening, facilitated by the adult and they build up a store of stories, songs and rhymes. When children are planning their activities they need to ask questions or state intentions, listen to the plans of others, think through possible sequences and learn specific vocabulary and linguistic forms such as the future tense. During work-time the adult works with groups and individuals, and children are encouraged to use language in action, using the present tense, and to seek help from adults and peers. At clean-up time they hear songs and rhymes and they are encouraged to ask questions or describe their actions. During review time they report their actions to a small group of children and an adult, ask questions about the activities of others, listen to others, use the past tense of verbs and identify how problems were solved. During small group time they discuss with the adult and other children the task in hand, collaborate on specific projects, and ask and answer questions.

The High/Scope approach is one which has been evaluated extensively, and it is described here to show that, in high quality pre-schooling which is child-centred, the language skills needed for work-planning and collaboration with children and adults can be emphasised. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta has already provided some in-service training in the adaptation of the High/Scope approach to the naíonraí in recent years, and further exploration, with continued back-up for those applying this approach, appears warranted. An adoption of this approach on a wider scale could have benefits both for facilitating Irish acquisition and promoting general cognitive and social development.

The High/Scope approach shares some features with a pre-school whose primary aim is to develop language skills, the Language Acquisition Pre-school (LAP) at the University of Kansas (Rice 1991, Rice and Wilcox, 1995, Bunce 1995). This pre-school caters for normally developing children as well as those who are language-impaired or learning through their second language. It strongly emphasises language development throughout the curriculum by providing rich opportunities for language use and interaction, by developing routines to help children connect events and language, and by stimulating social interaction between children. Tabors and Snow (1994), in reviewing the research concerning the most effective type of pre-school for second language learning, included many of these features, such as a routine and consistent organisational structure in which activities happen at regular intervals and in predictable ways, and a language-rich environment in which teachers use language that encourages both comprehension and production skills. Discussion of the adaptation of programmes such as High/Scope and LAP to the naíonraí might be considered on pre-service and in-service training courses.

In conclusion, it appears that the majority of naíonraí provide children with a wide range of beneficial activities in pursuit of the objectives of promoting children's overall development and fostering their acquisition and development of Irish. It is of great importance that children in naíonraí should have access to a wide range of activities, but this cannot be achieved in the immersion situation by using the same approach as is found in mother-tongue play-groups, with the L2 simply added 'on top' of that framework. Instead, early immersion requires a re-organisation from the bottom up, to ensure a careful balance between language- and object- or activity-centred activities and a methodology which ensures that, no matter what activity they are engaged in, the maximum possible number of children receive comprehensible Irish input and opportunities to interact in the language.

5.5 ORGANISATION OF WORK

This survey attempted to collect some information about the organisation of work in naíonraí, along guidelines issued by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. Training courses emphasise the benefit of a yearly, term and weekly work plan, and the use of other language teaching foci such as *téama na seachtaine* (theme of the week) and *pointe suime na maidine* (morning discussion topic). Stiúrthóir responses to these questions are given in Tables 5.4 and 5.5.

The high non-response rates on these questions were unusual in this survey, and probably indicate that many of the non-responders do not operate this system of yearly and term planning, but are aware that An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta advises it. The relatively low figure for the yearly work plan points to the need for further assistance regarding longer-term planning in training and in-service courses. Raising the level of term-planning might be a more feasible objective initially for this group of Stiúrthóirí. The high level of weekly planning indicates that Stiúrthóirí find such short-term planning easiest to use. However, such short-term planning is likely to lack direction, and to be less effective in promoting language development.

These responses in regard to planning point again to a need for longer and more comprehensive training. The differences and benefits of the longer-term plans,

Table 5.4 Work plans

Do you use the following?	% *Yes*	% *No*	% *No response*
Yearly work plan	45	16	39
Term work plan	61	10	29
Weekly work plan	78	9	13

implemented in conjunction with weekly plans, need to be fully explored. The benefits of such planning for second language acquisition are likely to be significant, in allowing Stiúrthóirí more easily to plan activities around the introduction, reinforcement and use of particular vocabulary and phrases, so that there is constant review as well as new material. Such planning would therefore facilitate the achievement of particular language objectives, as well as the assessment of the children's progress in Irish over time.

Regarding the questions on *téama na seachtaine* ('theme of the week') and *pointe suime na maidine* ('morning discussion topic') considerable differences in the frequency of use of these strategies were reported (see Table 5.5). Over half of Stiúrthóirí reported that they use these language teaching practices at least usually, but a substantial proportion did so only from time to time, and about 10% never used them.

Table 5.5 Téama na seachtaine & Pointe suime na maidine

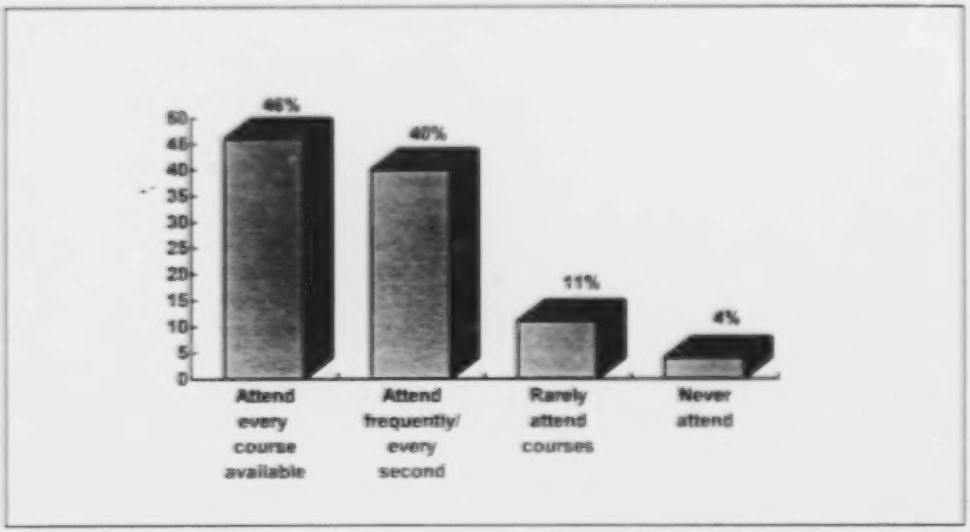
Do you use the following?	*% Téama na seachtaine* ('theme of the week')	*% Pointe suime na maidine* ('morning discussion topic')
Always	21	26
Usually	36	37
Sometimes	30	25
Not used	10	9
No response	3	4

There appear to be difficulties with the implementation of these strategies by a substantial proportion of Stiúrthóirí, and a need for greater training in their use. It is noteworthy that in the discussion in the next section of topics on which Stiúrthóirí would like to attend courses, over half reported that they would like in-service training on work organisation and planning. These results indicate a need to give a high priority to this issue.

5.6 IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Comhairleoirí offer on average one short in-service course (day or half-day) per term to Stiúrthóirí in their district. Stiúrthóirí were asked about their attendance at in-service training courses. The results are presented in Fig. 5.4. Almost half of Stiúrthóirí attend every course available in their area, and most of the remainder attend frequently. Only a minority of about 15% of Stiúrthóirí 'rarely' or 'never' attend courses. This is a satisfactory result overall and indicates a very high level of commitment and interest on the part of Stiúrthóirí.

Fig. 5.4 In-service training



It is possible that some Stiúrthóirí attend infrequently because of home duties or because they are caring for their own children. Others may believe that the courses on offer in their area are not suitable or attractive to them. Ní Mhí (1986) surveyed 10 Stiúrthóirí, and found that 7 attended in-service courses rarely, citing as reasons for non-attendance: that they were not aware courses were being run (2); that the dates of courses did not suit them (3); and that they found courses through the medium of Irish too difficult and too theoretical to understand (3). All of Ní Mhí's 10 respondents reported that they preferred practical to theoretical courses.

It is, of course, difficult to organise in-service courses on topics which interest all Stiúrthóirí in a particular region, or to choose dates which are convenient for all. Since it is essential to maintain some training contact with those Stiúrthóirí who rarely attend in-service courses, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta might consider sending brief up-date sheets or pamphlets to all Stiúrthóirí on certain topics.

In 1993, the year of this study, 19 courses were offered in 10 locations around the country on the following topics:

- Art for children and equipment in the naionra
- Setting up a naionra
- The special needs of children with a handicap in the naionra
- Drama and play therapy
- Workshop on story-telling
- Using puppets in the naionra
- Story-telling
- Handicrafts for pre-school children
- Games with music in the naionra
- Problems in the naionra
- New perspectives on using puppets
- Management in the naionra
- Health and safety in the naionra
- Working with very young children in the naionra
- Planning and work organisation in the double naionra

These courses show the breadth of concerns targeted. The inclusion of courses dealing with language-centred activities such as story-telling and the use of puppets and music is noteworthy in reflecting the attempt by Comhairleoiri to encourage frequent use of such activities. The next section looks at the types of courses desired by Stiúrthóirí.

5.6.1 Types of In-Service Courses Desired

Stiúrthóirí were asked about the types of in-service courses they would most like to attend. From a range of options suggested, they indicated the preferences given in Table 5.6 (numbers do not add to 100% as respondents could select more than one).

This indication of Stiúrthóirí preferences should prove useful to An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta in the planning of courses in the future. However, it is important that in-service training should not operate in a piecemeal way, going from very brief discussions of one topic to another, but should be planned so as to address over a longer period some of the central issues of early immersion education, with feedback on and review of the concepts introduced in earlier courses.

International research on in-service training for teachers has pointed to basic problems with the concept as it often operates. Brine and Shapson (1989), reviewing earlier research by Fullan (1982) and Hunter (1985) pointed to inadequacies in planning time, teacher input, follow-through and support, as well as to *ad hoc* programmes which create a patchwork effect which is unable to effect educational change. Fullan (1982) outlines seven causes of failure by in-service programmes and these are listed below (in quotes) and discussed. However, it must be stressed that they are included here in order to illustrate some of the widespread problems regarding in-service training in general and offer possible suggestions for overcoming such problems, rather than pointing to specific failings of in-service training offered to Stiúrthóirí of naíonraí.

Table 5.6 In-service course topics desired

Course area	%
Arts and crafts	61
Drama and puppets	57
Planning & organising work in the naíonra	53
Psychology	45
Health issues	41
Using music, rhymes and tapes	34
Second language acquisition	33
Art - painting, clay etc.	31
Other	5

1. '*One-shot workshops are widespread but ineffective.*' Fullan stressed that time is needed for participants to understand fully the information presented, integrate it, analyse it, practise it and finally implement new skills. If short periods of time are the only opportunities available for in-service, it might be beneficial to organise a series over a period on the same theme, allowing more time for reflection on new practices and support for attempts to implement them.
2. '*Topics are frequently selected by people other than those for whom the in-service is intended.*' Fullan pointed out that effective course design requires input from participants as well as feedback.
3. '*Follow-up support for ideas and practices introduced in in-service programs occurs in only a very small number of cases.*' The implementation of new skills needs particular follow-up and observation, rather than being subsumed in general issues.
4. '*Follow-up evaluation occurs infrequently.*' Ideally, such follow-up would take place in an atmosphere of respect and constructive criticism. Brine and Shapson (1989) trained their trainees to observe, analyse and provide feedback to each other, which may be less threatening than follow-up from an outside source.
5. '*In-service rarely addresses individual needs and concerns.*' Participants may be reluctant to admit their greatest concerns because of the fear that they will be considered incompetent by the group or trainers. Some in-service trainers begin courses with a session when teachers can talk about general concerns rather than the topic of the course only (for example, Ó Laoire, Autonomous Language Learning Project, personal communication, May 1995).
6. '*The majority of programs involve teachers from many different schools and/or school districts, but there is not recognition of the differential impact of positive*

and negative factors within the systems to which they must return.' In the case of naionrai, courses which are locally organised by Comhairleoirí have the merit of facilitating consideration of local factors, but such consideration is easier in small districts than in the larger city areas comprising, for example, both middle-class and working-class areas.

7. *'There is a profound lack of any conceptual basis in the planning and implementation of in-service programs that would ensure their effectiveness.'* Brine and Shapson (1989) stress the need to draw on research on in-service education and change theory (e.g. Joyce and Showers 1980) and immersion teacher education (Obadia 1984, Tardif 1985).

In addition to the foregoing, Brine and Shapson (1989:475) claim that the two characteristics of effective in-service training can be described as follows:

- professional development must focus on a need and
- teachers must have the opportunity to interact with each other, share ideas, and help one another, and must have some external assistance.

Thus, the issues in providing in-service training to educators, including Stiúrthóirí, are broader ones than the selection of a topic and a speaker. Ideally, series of in-service courses would be directed at general issues as well as at specific needs of Stiúrthóirí, with follow-up in the form of feedback from Comhairleoirí on the implementation of new skills, but also with peer interaction and opportunities for further discussion and refining of those skills. It would also be beneficial to target some courses at those who need to develop or improve particular skills. It is such training which will contribute most to the effectiveness of the naionrai.

5.7 HELP DESIRED

Stiúrthóirí were asked what help from a range of options supplied would be most beneficial. Their responses are summarised in Table 5.7, in order of frequency of selection (numbers do not add to 100, since respondents could select more than one):

Over half of all the respondents expressed an interest in visiting other naionrai. This may be difficult to organise for Stiúrthóirí who are some distance from another naionra or for those who are engaged in their own naionra every day. However, in-service training might be able to address this need through the use of video-taped excerpts from a range of naionrai, with Stiúrthóirí being encouraged to discuss and comment on the differences from their own practice and experience.

A desire to visit other naionrai is also linked to a desire for more contact with other Stiúrthóirí, selected by almost a third of respondents. While the Comhairleoirí provide advice and guidance, Stiúrthóirí may feel isolated from their colleagues and in need of a peer relationship. Almost one third of naionrai are located in private homes, and about half of all naionrai do not employ an Assistant because they are small. These factors, in conjunction with the 65% of respondents who reported that there is no other naíonra in their area, mean that a number of Stiúrthóirí have no easy access to others engaged in the same work. Visits from Comhairleoirí are a valuable aid in counteracting this isolation and linking with the broader context of the naíonra movement, but they provide a different type of support than is available from peers. Osborn and Milbank (1987) in their study of early education in the UK, also noted the isolation of the nursery class teacher from others teaching the same age-group, and claimed that 'the support and sharing of ideas with others [teaching the same age-group]...are....essential for sustaining enthusiastic and lively classroom practice' (p.219).

Table 5.7 Most effective help

What type of help do you think you most need?	%
Opportunity to visit other naíonraí	53
New equipment	42
More contact with other Stiúrthóirí	32
Time to attend courses already on offer	30
New courses	28
Irish courses for parents	27
Recognition from local primary school	23
Irish course for self or assistant	18
More contact with nearest all-Irish school	13
More support from parents	12
Recognition from local all-Irish school	9
More contact with parents	4
More contact with Comhairleoir	3

Of the 69% of Stiúrthóirí who reported that there is an all-Irish or Gaeltacht school in their area, over a quarter (27%) said that their naíonra was attached to it, and almost a third (31%) said that they have regular contact with the school. However, over a quarter (26%) of those who do have access to an all-Irish school reported that they have very little contact with it, and a further 8% said that they had none at all.

Table 5.8 presents the level of satisfaction reported regarding contact with local schools. Only a minority (12%) of those with an all-Irish school in their area were unhappy with their level of contact, while about a quarter (28%) of those with an English-medium school in their area were dissatisfied. Almost a quarter (23%) of all respondents reported that they would find it helpful to receive recognition from their local primary school, and this further expresses the isolation of some Stiúrthóirí. Overall, the majority of Stiúrthóirí are satisfied with their contact with their local all-Irish or national school, although there is a slightly higher level of dissatisfaction regarding contact with national than with all-Irish schools.

Table 5.8 Satisfaction with contact with local schools

Level of satisfaction regarding contact with local all-Irish or Gaeltacht primary school (if there is one) and with local primary school (if there is one)	*% Local all-Irish/Gaeltacht school N =113*	*% Local English-medium school N=131*
Very satisfied	48	25
Satisfied	35	47
Dissatisfied	8	20
Very dissatisfied	4	8
Not available	4	0
	100	100

Table 5.9 details the type of contact with local schools. Unsurprisingly, respondents report more frequent contact with local all-Irish schools than with local English-medium primary schools, since it is likely that more children go on to the Irish-medium school when it is available. Apparently some Stiúrthóirí are satisfied to have no contact with their local school(s). Nevertheless, it seems regrettable that as many as 66% of Stiúrthóirí have little or no contact with their local national school when it is possible that at least some of their children may attend that school, and that as many as 34% have little or no contact with their local all-Irish school. The facilitation of contact with local schools, initially perhaps through formal meetings of the Stiúrthóir and her Comhairleoir with the Principal and the infant class teacher, might begin to address this gap, in focusing on the children's achievements and in reporting on individual children's skills about the time of their transition to that school. Overall, however, the question of recognition officially and by local schools is a contentious one, which has its source in the official lack of recognition for the value of pre-school education for all children, and this will need to be addressed at that level also.

Given the risk for Stiúrthóirí of professional isolation, a pairing arrangement between Stiúrthóirí might help to overcome the sense of isolation from peers, if they could meet informally or at least have telephone contact at intervals. At present 35% reported that there is another naíonra in their area and of these, 67% reported that they have some level of contact with each other. However, Comhairleoirí might be able to co-ordinate and encourage such contact among the other 65% of Stiúrthóirí who are not close enough to make such contact themselves informally, suggesting that they meet, telephone or write to some individuals at regular intervals, possibly giving some topics to facilitate such contacts. In addition, 73% of respondents reported that there was an English-medium play-group in their area, but only 21% of these had any contact with such play-groups. It might be beneficial to explore the possibilities for contact between Stiúrthóirí and

Table 5.9 Type of contact with local schools

What level of contact do you have with:	*% Local all-Irish/ Gaeltacht school N=113*	*% Local English-medium primary school N=131*
Regular contact with school	31	18
Children visit school each year	31	13
Little contact with school	26	27
No contact with school	8	39
Not available	4	2
	100	100

playgroup leaders on an informal level, though of course issues of competition for children might militate against such contact in some cases.

Almost half of the Stiúrthóirí indicated that they would like new equipment. New naíonraí receive a kit worth about £300, but after this start-up provision, Stiúrthóirí and their management committees must raise their own funds for additional or replacement equipment and toys. As a result, many Stiúrthóirí and parents spend a great deal of time and energy in fund-raising. It should also be noted that this is not simply a question of funds, since it is also the case that there are relatively fewer teaching aids available for an Irish immersion play-group than for an English-medium group, although An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta and other organisations have been attempting to remedy this situation in recent years.

In addition to the review of what Stiúrthóirí would like to change, it is also interesting to look in Table 5.7 at what Stiúrthóirí do *not* wish to change. Since only 3% indicated that they would like more contact with their Comhairleoir, it can be concluded that they find the present level of contact, about every month, to be satisfactory or sufficient. Only 4% wanted more contact with parents, and 50% of them reported that they spoke to parents more than once a week, and a further 29% once a week. However, the parents' responses showed that 39% of them desired more involvement in the naíonra. Table 5.10 summarises the preferences of Stiúrthóirí with regard to parents.

A majority of Stiúrthóirí say that they welcome parents as helpers sometimes, but this may depend on the parents' taking the initiative and offering help. Twenty-one per cent of Stiúrthóirí said that they would like to have parents in the naíonra more often, but 18% said that they would prefer not, indicating a divergence of opinion on the subject which may be dependent on the level of Irish competence within a group of parents. A quarter of Stiúrthóirí would like parents to help more with fund-raising, but there is a clear

Table 5.10 Desires of Stiúrthóirí with regard to parents' involvement

Item selected	%
If a parent wants to help in the naíonra sometimes, I welcome him/her	69
I would like to have parents in the naíonra more often	21
I would prefer to keep parents outside the naíonra	18
I would like parents to take a more active part in fund-raising	25
I would like more support from parents	12
I would like more contact with parents	4
I encourage parents to do Irish courses	55
I would like more Irish courses for parents	27
I would like to start a social group for parents	17
Parents already have a social group	8
Parents operate an Irish-medium 'parents and toddlers' group	1

reluctance on the part of parents to do so, since over 90% of parents reported that they never helped with fund-raising and management issues.

Stiúrthóirí appear to focus mainly on parents' Irish, with 55% encouraging parents to attend courses, and 27% wanting more such courses. Interestingly, 18% of parents also wanted Irish courses, and about a fifth of parents desired an Irish conversation group. It is probably an accurate perception that parental support in the home for the child's newly learned Irish words and phrases constitutes significant support for the work of the Stiúrthóir, hence the emphasis on their levels of Irish.

5.8 ASSESSMENT BY COMHAIRLEOIRÍ

Stiúrthóirí helpfully provided answers to detailed questions about their naíonra, but, for some objective comparisons between naíonraí, Comhairleoirí were asked to complete a general evaluation on each naíonra in their area, giving a broader perspective on their functioning. Comhairleoirí all have experience working with naíonraí, and this, in conjunction with their monthly visits to the naíonraí in their district, makes their assessment a valuably informed one. They were asked to rate each naíonra under 9 headings on a five-point scale, from '*mishásúil*' (unsatisfactory) to '*ar fheabhas*' (excellent). The results of some of these ratings are provided in Table 5.11.

Comhairleoirí were asked to rate the Stiúrthóir and her Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir with regard to their use of Irish in dealing with the children. This is therefore not an estimate of the Irish competence of the person involved, but an assessment of her ability to present the language in a way which facilitates its acquisition. Comhairleoirí also rated the quality of the interaction between Stiúrthóirí and children. The results of these ratings are presented in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11 Comhairleoir rating of child-appropriate register and interaction

	Use of Irish with children		*Interaction with children*	
	% Stiúrthóirí N=162	*% Assistants N=84*	*% Stiúrthóirí N=162*	*% Assistants N=84*
Excellent	25	13	31	17
Good	52	34	50	61
Satisfactory	17	32	17	20
Weak	6	13	2	2
Unsatisfactory	1	7	0	0
	100	100	100	100

As already discussed, a quarter of Stiúrthóirí were considered excellent, and the majority of both Stiúrthóirí and their co-workers were considered to be at least satisfactory in their use of Irish with the children, but 7% of Stiúrthóirí and as many as 20% of their assistants are considered by Comhairleoirí to be weak or unsatisfactory in their use of Irish to the children. This is, of course, tied to Irish competence in general, since as already reported in Fig. 5.3, 18% of Stiúrthóirí and as many as 43% of the Stiúrthóirí Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóirí were judged to have at best 'satisfactory' Irish.

Almost a third of Stiúrthóirí were considered to have excellent interpersonal skills with children, and only 2% of Stiúrthóirí and their assistants were judged to be weak on this measure. This of course reflects the fact that the people who choose to work with young children generally relate well to them. Nevertheless, about a fifth of all Stiúrthóirí and their assistants show room for improvement in their personal dealings with the children, and might be helped by in-service training.

Comhairleoirí were asked to evaluate the range of activities provided in each naíonra, and the organisation of activities. Their ratings are presented in Table 5.12. A sixth of naíonraí were considered by Comhairleoirí to have an excellent range and organisation of activities. However, a tenth were judged to be at best weak on this item, and over a quarter only satisfactory. This may, of course, partly reflect a resources problem, since it is difficult to provide a wide range of activities without adequate funding.

Utilisation of the range of activities to promote language learning and use was considered by Comhairleoirí to be at least good in over half of naíonraí, but it was only satisfactory in another quarter, and at best weak in the remainder. Thus, it would appear that there is room for improvement in about half of naíonraí to optimise children's language learning and use through all of the activities they engage in during their time in the naíonra.

Table 5.12 Range and organisation of activities (Comhairleoir rating).

	Range of activities %	*Organisation of activities* %	*Reinforcement of language through activities* %
Excellent	16	16	14
Good	45	44	41
Satisfactory	29	27	26
Weak	7	10	16
Unsatisfactory	3	2	3
	100	100	100

Regarding the atmosphere in the naíonraí, Comhairleoirí judged that about three-quarters had a pleasant atmosphere which promoted development, with 'controlled freedom'. Children were judged to be at ease in 90% of naíonraí, and two-thirds of naíonraí were judged to offer a lot of variety. Comhairleoirí considered that 16% of naíonraí were too noisy while another 5% were too quiet; 12% showed a lack of discipline while 7% showed an excess of discipline, with a school-like atmosphere.

Comhairleoirí noted whether individual Stiúrthóirí had special skills in particular areas. Almost half of all Stiúrthóirí were judged to be highly skilled in story-telling, use of rhymes, music and crafts, while less than a third were highly skilled in art or drama.

In response to a general evaluative overview, Comhairleoirí were asked whether they thought that individual Stiúrthóirí made economical use of the time available in the naíonra to promote the child's overall development, and 19% were judged to be excellent, 42% good, and 29% satisfactory. However, a minority, 10%, were considered to be at best weak in this regard.

The picture that emerges from this assessment is of a distribution of naíonraí which is tilted towards excellence, with about 20% performing excellently, and about 70% performing well or satisfactorily, but with about 10% performing weakly. The first priority, therefore, is to raise the level of performance of the weaker group. To this end, there might be consideration of targeted re-training for those who are performing least well, with, in addition (or as an alternative for those who are reluctant to attend) a targeting of information up-dates and some resources. A pairing arrangement between

Stiúrthóirí who are judged to be performing effectively with those who are less experienced might also provide a relatively unthreatening means of assisting these Stiúrthóirí to develop professionally. Finally, a longer-stay language course in the Gaeltacht with some parts focusing on interacting through Irish with young children might be the most important type of support which could be provided for those performing weakly, though this would require commitment from the individual Stiúrthóirí and Stiúrthóirí Cúnta involved, and encouragement or incentives from An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta.

5.9 CONCLUSIONS

The assessment by Comhairleoirí indicates that the majority of Stiúrthóirí perform their complex task either well or optimally, with only a minority in need of additional training or re-training. Responses from the Stiúrthóirí show that they are, in general, a group of highly committed and experienced workers with particular needs regarding training and equipment which must be addressed. The preparatory training course run by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta is of vital importance, since this is the only, or the most specialised training, received by the majority of Stiúrthóirí. Current proposals to extend and develop this training course and gain official recognition for this qualification are welcomed. There is also a need to assign a high priority to the improvement of Irish skills in Stiúrthóirí and Assistants with lower levels of competence. These two central questions of training and Irish competence in Stiúrthóirí are discussed in Chapter 8.

The need for more resources for naíonraí are well recognised, but less attention has been given to the need for Stiúrthóirí to interact with their peers and observe other naíonraí. Issues such as low pay and lack of professional recognition and advancement are also serious ones, and need to be addressed in order to maintain commitment and increase effectiveness.

Regarding activities, it is clear that most Stiúrthóirí provide a wide range of activities for the children in their naíonraí, aimed at benefiting their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development, as well as their second language learning. However, the most successful naíonraí utilise all of these activities for advancing the children's Irish *in the process of* developing other skills. Early immersion requires an adaptation of the methodology in use in mother-tongue pre-schooling, and a careful balance of activities and groupings to ensure that children receive the maximum amount of Irish input and opportunities to interact in the language. Such work planning and organisation requires detailed and comprehensive training if it is to be implemented most effectively.

Stiúrthóirí face a most demanding task, but it is important that their dual objectives of fostering general development and Irish acquisition are not submerged in a need either simply to keep children busy, or to teach them in a formal way, as Goutard (1980) outlined. Instead they need to steer a course between both extremes, with constant review of the level of Irish input received by each child in the course of a session's activities.

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Chapter 6

Measuring Irish Achievement in the Naíonra

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A key aim of the research strategy was to obtain an objective assessment of the Irish achievement of a representative sample of naíonra children. These data on achievement can be linked to information supplied by the parents, Stiúrthóirí and Comhairleoirí, allowing an analysis of the range of factors which contributes to the child's experience of the naíonra.

In this chapter, the process of test development is outlined (Section 6.2); the tests for comprehension, production and imitation of Irish, and the test of general cognitive ability (administered in each child's mother tongue) are described (Section 6.3). Section 6.4 deals with the selection of naíonraí and of children for testing. A key feature of this process was that naíonraí were stratified according to the areas allocated to each of the ten Comhairleoirí: within each Comhairleoir's area, every naíonra had an equal probability of selection, and within each chosen naíonra every child had an equal probability of selection. This allows the construction of weights so that results for the 225 children actually selected for testing can be generalised to the total population of naíonra children from which they were drawn. The reliability and validity of the tests are discussed in Section 6.5. Section 6.6 describes the overall levels of proficiency attained by naíonra pupils in Irish comprehension and production, and the accuracy of their imitation of Irish utterances, and it outlines the inter-relationships between scores on these tests, as well as the test of general cognitive ability. The final section gives an overview of what the test results indicate about the children's knowledge of Irish. Chapter 7 will then go on to consider the factors which exert the greatest influence on the children's Irish test results.

6.2 TEST DEVELOPMENT

Three instruments were used to measure different aspects of the child's development and achievement:

1. an objective Irish test of the children's comprehension, production and imitation in Irish, administered entirely through Irish, but with many examples

and checks completed to ensure that the child understood the task to be performed;
2. a test of general cognitive development which was administered in the child's native language, English or Irish; and
3. an assessment of the child's overall development in terms of linguistic, social and physical skills by the Stiúrthóir.

All tests were administered to the children individually. The tests were devised by the researcher, in consultation with experienced Stiúrthóirí and members of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. Egan's (1981) test of Irish achievement in the naíonra was used as a guideline, but the methodology had to be adapted to suit the change in sample size and test situation. Given the limited time possible for the testing of each child, by non-psychologists, it was decided to develop short tests which could be administered by the Comhairleoirí. It was necessary that the test of general cognitive ability be supplied both in Irish and English, so that every child could be tested in his/her mother-tongue. Both the tests of the children's Irish and the test of General Cognitive Ability were based on:

a) detailed prior observations of naíonra activities;
b) the recommendations of experienced naíonra personnel; and
c) adaptations of items from commercially available tests of pre-school children, comprising the Keele Pre-school Assessment Guide (Tyler 1980), the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (Psychological Corporation 1986), the Rhode Island Profile of Early Learning Behavior (Novack *et al.*1982) and the Pre-school Language Assessment Instrument (Blank *et al.* 1978).

The testing of children who are aged only 3-4 years obviously challenges the test developer to keep the test enjoyable and non-intimidating, and yet objective and probing. Since the children sampled were required to undergo tests both of their Irish proficiency and of general cognitive development, and since the attention span of three-year-old children is not long, there were also time constraints imposed on the length of any one test. The tests were piloted on a group of 30 children in February 1993, and revised in the light of those findings.

In the field, the tests of Irish achievement and General Cognitive Ability were administered by the Comhairleoirí of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. They are experienced naíonraí personnel who were familiar to the sampled children from monthly visits to the naíonraí in their individual districts. They participated in a short training course on administering the test. This course used taped examples of children's responses from the pilot to give them experience of the types of responses they could expect, and guidance in dealing with any problems. They committed themselves to making the testing as enjoyable and unthreatening as possible for the children, while maintaining an objective and impartial position with regard to test outcome. Tribute is paid here to their professionalism and commitment to this endeavour, which would not have been possible without them.

6.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE TESTS

6.3.1 The Irish Test

The test of the children's Irish achievement is of interest for several reasons. This is the first time that an objective test of three- to four-year-old children's Irish has been administered to such a large sample of children. This test attempts to establish a baseline of what children know after one year in an Irish-medium play-group, and formalises the knowledge which Stiúrthóirí and naíonraí personnel have of the extent of the children's achievement. This is valuable, since it will help teachers in primary schools, and others, to know what to expect from naíonra pupils. Thus, it is hoped that this study will contribute to a better awareness of the achievement of children in the naíonraí, enabling teachers to build on the foundations already laid down.

The Irish tests comprised tests on comprehension, production and imitation. Because the majority of the children in the naíonra are experiencing their first exposure to Irish they were expected to have better comprehension than production of the language at this stage. Therefore, in order to capture the greater spread of abilities, there were more items in the comprehension test than in the production test. The language items in each test were drawn from several domains such as colours, parts of the body, shapes, common actions, children's possessions, relevant adjectives, and phrases which relate to common naíonra activities and experiences such as eating, distribution of coats etc. The Irish test developed as part of this project is a research instrument, with potential application in further studies of the naíonraí. It cannot, at present, be made available for general perusal or use, in order to safeguard this future potential as a validated research instrument.

6.3.2 The Irish Comprehension Test

The comprehension test contained 36 items. After several sample items which ensured that children understood the task required of them (i.e. point to the object requested), they proceeded to the test items. In 30 items children were presented with three pictures, and asked to choose a particular item to show that they had understood which item the tester had asked for, e.g. *cá bhfuil* ***an madra?*** (where is **the dog**?). The remaining six items in this test consisted of requests that the child carry out certain actions such as *dún do shúile* (close your eyes).

6.3.3 The Irish Production Test

The majority of the children in the test sample had experienced only two and a half term's exposure to Irish (amounting to about 30 weeks' attendance, with 10-15 hours each week) and their production of the language was still very restricted. Many children at this stage of second language acquisition are reluctant to speak the language, in fact, and manifest a 'silent period' (Tabors and Snow 1994, Saville-Troike 1988, Krashen, 1985, Hakuta, 1976) although their comprehension may be quite good. In her study of one child's acquisition of Irish in the naíonra, Owens (1992) began collecting data only in the child's second year in the naíonra. In devising the Irish production test, it was considered important to tap into the children's productive abilities as far as was possible, but it was recognised that, given the restrictions in time and the difficulty in eliciting language from young learners, the test would have to be realistic in the demands it placed on the children. For that reason it was kept quite short, but it allowed an opportunity for greater productivity on two picture description items.

The production test contained 21 items. The tester pointed to objects, pictures or body-parts, and asked the child to name them or say their colour. In the case of four items the children were shown one picture which was described by the tester, and then another picture was shown containing the antonym of the first descriptor, which the tester tried to elicit by pointing and saying, for example, *tá sé seo mór, tá sé seo -?* (this is big, this is----?). Two items consisted of free description of two scenes which related to naionra activities. It was considered necessary to use such naionra-related scenes in order to provide children who had no experience of Irish at home with a context for their spoken Irish, and to facilitate vocabulary. The children were initially shown a sample picture, which the tester described by saying: *Féach ar an bpictiúr seo. Tá siad ag ithe lóin. Féach na brioscaí agus an bainne. Tá an buachaill sin dána* (Look at this picture. They are eating lunch. Look at the biscuits and milk. That boy is naughty). The tester evaluated the children's output for fluency and comprehensiveness, on a six-point scale, ranging from 'no response', 'English only' (despite prompts) 'a few words in Irish', 'Irish phrases or broken sentences', 'one or two sentences and some words in Irish' and '3 Irish sentences or more'. Testers were instructed to begin with a general prompt: *cad tá sa phictiúr seo?* (what is in this picture?) and then to pause for at least 10 seconds. If the child remained silent they were instructed to point to a child in the picture and say *cad tá sé/sí sin a dhéanamh?* (what is he/she doing?). If the child still remained silent or spoke in English only, after a further pause, the testers were instructed to point to items in the picture, pause at each one and ask *féach air seo - cad é seo?* (look at this - what is this?). Thus, children were encouraged initially to give a general description of the picture, but after being given a reasonable opportunity for this, they were prompted to describe an action element of the picture, and finally, if no response was forthcoming, they were encouraged to describe or name items in the picture, in an attempt to elicit the highest level of spontaneous production in Irish that the child was capable of. It was not considered feasible to tape and transcribe the children's production on these items in this study, and instead it was decided to concentrate on their general level of Irish fluency in a description of the naionra scenes.

6.3.4 The Irish Imitation Test

The accuracy of the children's imitation of Irish phrases was measured, in order to test the link between imitative ability and second language acquisition skills. While it is accepted that imitation alone cannot capture the complex process of language acquisition, it has long been accepted (see Ervin-Tripp 1970, Slobin and Welsh 1973) that children's imitative ability provides information on their ability to perceive speech and store it in short-term memory, before organising output. It was decided to test the children's imitation of a number of sentences which were similar in vocabulary and construction to the type of language heard in the naionra. The tester was instructed to say the test-sentence naturally, neither too quickly nor too slowly, and once only. The children were given an example, and if they failed this example the tester gave them further help until she was sure that they understood the task. The imitation test items ranged from a sentence containing only two syllables to one containing ten syllables. The testers were instructed in how to mark as 'hits' the syllables which the children repeated, and 'misses' those which they did not.

6.3.5 The General Cognitive Ability Test: Native Language

This test was administered only in the child's native language, and two equivalent versions were therefore prepared, one in Irish and one in English. The tester was instructed to consult with the Stiúrthóir prior to testing regarding the child's dominant language, as well as making her own judgement on the matter. Both the English and the Irish versions of the test were included in the test booklet.

This test was based on several instruments for pre-school assessment (listed in Section 6.2), but had to be much shorter than any already available since this test needed to be carried out after the Irish tests. Therefore it is, of necessity, less narrowly focused than the Irish language tests, but it was considered to be a useful measure for the purposes of this research of the children's general cognitive ability. The test aimed to assess children's knowledge of personal details (e.g. name, address, sex), memory (repetition of numbers, order of appearance of various items), time concepts (days of the week, understanding of 'today' and 'tomorrow') and number concepts (counting blocks), first language skills (knowledge of various nursery rhymes, ability to re-tell a story, understanding of complex prepositions, ability to follow a three-part instruction, and ability to list differences between, for example, a bird and a dog).

6.3.6 Stiúrthóir Assessment of Child

In addition to the individual tests of Irish and General Cognitive Ability administered by the Comhairleoir, additional information on the tested children was collected from their Stiúrthóiri. They were asked to assess each child on a scale of *lag* (weak), *sásúil* (satisfactory), *go maith* (good), *an-mhaith* (very good), *ar fheabhas* (excellent) under the following headings (based on the Keele Pre-school Assessment Instrument): *Neamhspleáchas* (independence), *Forbairt Shóisialta* (social development), *Liniocht* (drawing), *Scileanna Láimhseála,* (manual skills), *Gluaiseacht* (mobility), *Scéalaiocht* (story-telling and story-comprehension), *Ceol agus Rainn* (music and rhymes), *Cumas Teanga Dúchais* (first language skills), *Scileanna Sealbhú an Dara Teanga* (second language acquisition skills). Examples of each category were given to Stiúrthóiri. For present purposes, these ratings are averaged to give an overall Stiúrthóir rating for each child, excluding the rating for handedness and second language acquisition skills. This rating is called the 'Stiúrthóir Assessment'.

6.4 SAMPLING AND WEIGHTING

The census of children in naíonraí in February 1993 was used as a sampling frame in selecting the children to be tested. The 182 naíonra sessions in the Census were stratified according to the areas allocated to each of the ten Comhairleoirí, since it was they, as familiar visitors to their districts' naíonraí, who would conduct the testing, and it was important to try to spread the considerable workload between them. Two sessions were chosen in each Comhairleoir's area. A third randomly selected session was also included for each of the three Comhairleoirí dealing with Dublin, which contains a greater density of naíonraí. An additional randomly selected session was also included in two other areas, in order to ensure adequate representation of Gaeltacht naíonraí, giving a total of 25 sampled naíonraí.

Within each Comhairleoir's area, every naíonra session had an equal probability of selection. Within each chosen naíonra every child had an equal probability of selection. When a naíonra was randomly sampled, 10 children from that naíonra's roll were, in turn, randomly selected, with two substitutes to allow for children missing through illness etc. on the days of testing. When naíonraí with fewer than 10 children were selected, all of the children on their roll were tested. A random sample of 225 children was finally drawn from the 25 sampled naíonra and each child was tested individually. Of this sample of 225, 167 children were in Galltacht naíonraí, and 58 were in Gaeltacht naíonraí.

However, the result of this process was that overall, some children and some naíonraí were more likely than others to be selected for the test sample. Although the naíonraí selected in a given Comhairleoir's district had an equal probability of selection, some Comhairleoirí had fewer naíonraí in their districts than others, so that the naíonraí nationwide did not all have an equal probability of appearing in the final sample. Children served by the Comhairleoirí with fewest naíonraí in their care had a better chance of having their naíonra selected in the first instance, and, once their naíonra was selected, children in smaller naíonraí were more likely to be selected subsequently for testing. In fact, they were certain to be selected if the naíonra had only 10 pupils or fewer.

These small differences can easily be calculated and the results adjusted to be what they would have been had the sample been on a nationally randomised basis, rather than randomly within districts[1]. Weights can be constructed corresponding to the inverse of the probability of selection. In this way, naíonraí and children who are under-represented in the sample can be given a higher weight in the analysis, and naíonraí which are over-represented can be given a lower weight to arrive at results which are representative of the situation for *all children in all naionrai*.

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[1] As indicated earlier, the probability of selection for a given naíonra depends simply on the ratio between the number of naíonraí selected and the total number of naíonraí in the relevant Comhairleoir's area; and the probability of selection for each child depends on the ratio between the number of children selected (usually, 10 or, in smaller naíonraí, simply the number of pupils in the naíonra) and the number of children in the naíonra.

While weights which simply correct for the probability of selection give a sample which is generally representative of the national situation, there is additional information on the population under study (all children in all naíonraí) which can be used to ensure greater accuracy in certain aspects. The information on home language, obtained from parents and Stiúrthóirí, was used to derive adjusted weights, which ensure that weighted analyses will accurately reflect the linguistic background of the total population of naíonra children. The adjustment was made using a crosstabulation of children's home language background (English, Irish or a mixture) and Gaeltacht/Galltacht location from the naíonra Census statistics and from the test sample, weighted using inverse of probability of selection. The adjustment is derived by taking the ratio of the population in each cell to the numbers in the test sample in the same cell.[1]

Table 6.1 shows some basic statistics on age and sex for the population of naíonra pupils, the selected sample, and the weighted sample.

Table 6.1 Distribution of children by age and sex: population and test sample

	Naionra Census N=2,487	*Unweighted test sample N=225*	*Weighted test sample*
Proportion female	49.3%	52.4%	49.8%
Mean age	4.06	4.15	4.14
Standard deviation of age	0.54	0.49	0.48

The children in the test sample are, on average, about 1 month older than the average in the total population, even when weighting is taken into account. The somewhat lower standard deviation of age in the test sample is largely due to some under-representation in the lowest age groups (aged under 3) - a small group in the population, and an even smaller one in the sample. This also contributes to the gap in average ages. Overall, however, the age and sex distributions of the population and the weighted test sample are very similar.

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[1] The main effect of this adjustment is on children within Gaeltacht areas, where naíonra Census statistics indicate that the test sample under-represented children with a home background described as English speaking, and over-represents those with a home background described as a mixture of English and Irish.

About 63% of the children tested had English as their home language, 32% heard some Irish as well as English at home, and 5% had Irish as the home language: this compares with figures of 73%, 21% and 6% for the total population. The weighted analyses correct for this difference, as indicated in Table 6.2, which shows the distribution of children across home language backgrounds within the Gaeltacht and Galltacht, in the population and in the test sample.

Table 6.2 Distribution of children by Galltacht/Gaeltacht and home language background and test sample

	Naíonra Census population N=2,487 %	*Unweighted test sample N=225* %	*Weighted test sample* %
Proportion in Galltacht	75.7	73.8	75.7
with home language:			
English	84.4	80.7	84.7
Irish and English	14.3	18.1	14.5
Irish	0.9	1.2	0.9
Other	0.5	-	-
Proportion in Gaeltacht	24.3	26.2	24.3
with home language:			
English	37.1	13.6	37.5
Irish and English	39.8	69.5	40.2
Irish	22.0	16.9	22.3
Other	1.1	-	-

The weighting procedure, as described earlier, incorporates an adjustment to ensure that the analyses are representative of the naíonra population in terms of these key characteristics, so that the distribution for the weighted sample matches closely that of the naíonra Census population. The minor remaining differences arise from the fact that the test sample does not include any children in whose homes languages other than Irish or English were spoken: this small fraction of the population cannot therefore be represented by the test sample.

6.5 ASSESSMENT OF THE TEST INSTRUMENTS

6.5.1 Validity

A test is considered to have *content validity* if its items are a balanced and adequate sampling of the course or curriculum it is designed to cover. No formal course or curriculum is laid down for the naíonraí, but objectives were identified in discussion with experienced personnel in An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, and from observations of naíonra sessions. Thus, in developing this test, content validity was safeguarded by eliciting item types and language elements to be tested from experienced Stiúrthóirí, observing a number of naíonra sessions, and examining the teaching materials, books and rhymes used currently in the naíonraí. This process indicated that, for the majority of children who enter the naíonra with little or no Irish, the first aim is to develop comprehension, with particular emphasis both on single-word vocabulary and on the acquisition of multi-morphemic phrases or formulas, such as *cé leis é seo?* (whose is this?). (For a discussion of formulas see Hickey 1993; Mhic Mhathúna 1995). For children who already have moderate or high proficiency in Irish, the objective is language enrichment, through vocabulary development and the promotion of better communicative competence in their use of Irish. It must be emphasised that the Irish tests focused only on the children's Irish achievement, and did not attempt to evaluate children's progress regarding the range of other educational and social objectives in operation in naíonraí.

The test of General Cognitive Ability was based on internationally recognised tests for pre-school children[1], adapted for Irish children. Its purpose here is to provide a benchmark of the children's general ability, so that their achievement in Irish can be placed in the context, not only of their home language background, but also of their general ability. Since time and funding constraints did not allow children to be tested at the beginning of their period in the naíonra, the results of this general test cannot be used to evaluate their progress on the wider objectives of the naíonraí, but only allow for comparison between children of different levels of cognitive ability with regard to their acquisition of Irish.

After the items had been written they were revised in consultation with experienced naíonraí personnel. This revised test was then piloted on almost 30 children, when some clarification of examples and testers' prompts were added. The test was considered to have adequate content validity following these clarifications.

6.5.2 Statistical Properties of the Tests: Reliability

A test must be a reliable and consistent measure of a particular skill if it is to be interpreted with confidence. There are several methods of estimating reliability. Under the test-retest method, the same test is applied to the same subjects on two distinct occasions, with the correlation between individual scores on each occasion used as an estimate of the reliability coefficient. The split-halves method, by contrast, relies on one administration of a test, but forms two sub-tests by splitting this test into two half-tests (often odd vs. even items). The alternative-form method combines elements of these two approaches: an alternative form of the test (covering all the same areas, but with alternative items) is administered a short time after the first test. The test-retest method has the inherent difficulty that experience with the first test may influence responses to the second; results based on split halves can depend on which of the many ways of splitting a test into two halves is chosen; and alternative forms of a test which are suitable for reliability measurement can be difficult to construct.

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[1] Keele Pre-school Assessment Guide (Tyler 1980), the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (Psychological Corporation 1986), the Rhode Island Profile of Early Learning Behavior (Novack *et al.* 1982) and the Pre-school Language Assessment Instrument (Blank *et al.* 1978).

For these reasons, Carmines and Zeller (1994) recommend the use of Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951), which is the most commonly used measure of the internal consistency of a test. It is closely related to the reliability coefficients calculated by splitting the test into two halves: Cronbach's alpha is the average value of the reliability coefficients obtained for all possible 'split-halves' of the test items. It can also be interpreted as the *expected* correlation between an actual test and a *hypothetical* alternative form. It represents a generalisation of the Kuder-Richardson formula (KR20) for tests involving only dichotomous items. Table 6.3 shows estimates of the reliability of each of the sub-tests based on Cronbach's alpha.

Table 6.3 Reliability coefficients: Cronbach's alpha

Test	*Language*	*Alpha*
Comprehension	Irish	0.86
Production	Irish	0.91
Imitation	Irish	0.95
General Cognitive Ability	Native language	0.90
Stiúrthóir Assessment	Irish and native language if not Irish	0.91

The estimated reliability coefficients for the different tests, lying between 0.86 and 0.95, are considered satisfactory for the purposes of the present study.[1] This indicates that the test can be used repeatedly in relatively unchanging situations and will produce consistent or nearly consistent results.

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[1] Carmines and Zeller (1994) indicate that, while it is difficult to specify a minimum value of reliability which should apply in all situations, their belief is that reliabilities 'should not be below 0.80 for widely used scales'.

The results on the Irish tests are used for two distinct purposes. The first, as indicated in Section 6.2, was to assess the degree to which children achieved the basic objectives of the naíonraí as regards the comprehension, imitation and production of simple utterances. This is dealt with mainly in Section 6.6 below. The second purpose was to provide a scale which offered good discrimination between individuals, in order to assess the influence of different home background and naíonra factors on Irish achievement (Chapter 7). In this context, a brief summary of the item difficulty and discrimination statistics is of interest.[1]

The distributions of item difficulty statistics (measured as the proportion of children passing a (dichotomous) item for each test) was calculated. The comprehension test was the least difficult, with most items being passed by over 60% of pupils, yielding a mean item difficulty of 68.8%. However, the production test, which is the one mainly used in the analysis in Chapter 7, has a mean item difficulty of just over 50%, close to the theoretical ideal for a test of individual differences, and a relatively even spread of item difficulty in the range 20% to 80%. The imitation test had a mean item difficulty of 62%, while the general cognitive ability test had a mean item difficulty of 58%.

The discrimination index for an item measures how well it discriminates between those with above average and below average scores on the relevant test. The distributions of item discrimination indices for each test are based on the *biserial* correlation between performance on the item and performance on the test.[2] These statistics indicate that for the production and imitation tests, *all* items exceed the 0.59 discrimination level. At least 77% of the items in each of the other tests (comprehension and general cognitive ability) had discrimination levels above 0.40 and at least 87% of the items had discrimination levels above 0.30.

6.6 INTER-TEST CORRELATIONS

The children's scores on the tests were found to be significantly correlated, as is shown in Table 6.4. The high correlation between Irish comprehension and Irish production indicates that the two tests are tapping into a common core of language learning. Irish imitation was found to correlate in a relatively stable manner with the two other Irish tests, and it may offer a useful tool to Stiúrthóirí in estimating children's progress informally. We recall that the rating by Stiúrthóirí of the test children in their naíonra takes account of their estimates of social and motor development as well as their

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[1] As Martin (1990) indicates, these properties are of less interest in the context of 'criterion-referenced' tests, when priority is accorded to the inclusion of items representing all relevant domains of knowledge, rather than the statistical properties described below.

[2] Technically, the biserial correlation can be defined as the 'product-moment correlation between a normally distributed latent variable underlying the right-wrong dichotomy and the criterion measure' (Millman and Greene, 1989, p. 360). Less formally, it is a correlation which takes into account the fact that one of the variables in question is a dichotomy (takes on either a value of 0 or of 1) and the other can be regarded as continuous.

Table 6.4 Correlations between tests

(N=225)	*Comprehension*	*Production*	*Imitation*	*GCA*
Production (Irish)	.77			
Imitation (Irish)	.60	.54		
General Cognitive Ability	.29	.32	.49	
Stiúrthóir Assessment (N=207)	.47	.48	.43	.29

Note: All correlations are significantly different from zero ($p < 0.001$).

language skills (see Section 6.3 above). Table 6.4 above shows that these ratings correlate significantly with the Irish and general cognitive ability tests. The test of general cognitive ability correlates less highly, although still positively and significantly, with comprehension and production. This is most likely due to the fact that it tested a broader range of skills, since in addition to children's use of their native language, it also tested their memory, concepts of space, time and number.

6.7 WHAT THE CHILDREN KNOW: AN OVERVIEW

6.7.1 Mastery Scores

This study looked at the *outcome* of the second language acquisition process, rather than the *process*, as was reviewed by Tabors and Snow (1994) and by Owens (1992) in a case study of one child acquiring Irish as L2 and Siencyn (1983) for 41 children acquiring Welsh. Tabors and Snow noted that minority language children initially went through a period of using only their home language in the L2 pre-school, followed by a non-verbal period when they are engaged in trying to crack the code of the L2 in order to comprehend it. When they begin to use the L2, it tends to be telegraphic or formulaic, until finally children begin to use their L2 productively.

Owens (1992) found that her daughter Eithne had, at the end of one year in the naíonra, quite advanced comprehension skills, with a considerable but more limited productive vocabulary, a store of rhymes and songs and a few phrases. It was not until her second year in the naíonra that Eithne showed more rapid progress in Irish production. This fits with the research evidence that young L2 learners may initially go through a 'silent period' of perhaps several months, when they are reluctant to speak any of the L2, although they may appear to comprehend quite well (Tabors and Snow, 1994, Hakuta, 1976, Hatch, 1974).

The process observed by Siencyn was that, by the end of the third term in the Welsh-medium play-group over half of the children had 'some Welsh understanding', while about a quarter had 'a considerable amount of Welsh understanding'. There was a fairly similar distribution for ability to speak Welsh at that visit. However, by the following November (after most of the subjects had started primary school) a larger gap between comprehension and production had opened up, with Welsh production lagging behind comprehension.

In this study, the Irish test was designed to show whether individual pupils or groups of pupils had reached particular levels of Irish proficiency The level of success expected was judged by experienced naíonra personnel familiar with children's progress in the naíonra. Generally, children doing a test are not expected to succeed on every item and when the tests were being constructed it was decided that a success rate of about 75% on each test would indicate mastery of the language objectives for the majority of naíonra children. Children who achieved a success rate of at least 40% were judged to have made minimal progress (see Harris, 1984). The children's levels of achievement on the tests are summarised in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Achievement on the Irish tests

Test Section	*% Reaching 40% success on test*			*% Reaching 75% success on test*		
	Galltacht N=167	*Gaeltacht N=58*	*All N=225*	*Galltacht N=167*	*Gaeltacht N=58*	*All N=225*
Comprehension	90	97	95	39	56	43
Production	53	75	59	7	35	14
Imitation	82	66	78	39	35	38

Note: Analyses weighted, as described in Section 6.4 to arrive at results which are representative of all children in all naíonraí.

In the case of the naíonra children there was evidence of a larger gap than in Siencyn's subjects between comprehension and production, with more children reaching a higher score on the comprehension test than on production. Almost all of the children made at least minimal progress in comprehension, indicating worthwhile development, especially among children who had entered the naíonra with no Irish at all. Overall then, over 40% of children leaving the naíonra can be said to have significant skills in Irish comprehension (scoring 75% or more), and 95% have made at least minimal progress in Irish comprehension (scoring 40% or more).

Regarding production, about half of Galltacht children and three-quarters of Gaeltacht children made at least minimal progress (scoring 40% or more). However, it is not surprising that, at this very early stage of second language acquisition, a far lower proportion reached the higher mastery level score of 75% on the production test. Over one-third of Gaeltacht children reached this mastery level compared to only 7% of Galltacht children.

Personality factors play a role in early L2 production, such as the child's temperament and willingness to take risks with the words and phrases that have been acquired. Wong Fillmore (1976) showed the variability between young Spanish-speaking learners of English is their use of formulas and phrases: one child was a risk taker who was prepared to use her small store of English words and formulas at every opportunity, while another seemed to adopt a more analytic strategy, building up from single words. Not all formulas facilitate language learning; it has been demonstrated that some language learned as chunks becomes fossilised, resisting segmentation. However, another type of formula, given the appropriate stimulus and scaffolding, is segmented and analysed before it is fossilised, and allows the child to progress from 'item learning' in Cruttenden's (1981) terms, to 'system learning'. Mhic Mhathúna (1995) commented that the crucial phase in L2 learning among the four children in the naíonraí she observed came when they began to use their formulas in novel contexts as well as in their original contexts, which coincided with the beginnings of more creative speech.

On the imitation test, more than 90% of the children could accurately imitate a two-syllable sentence, e.g. *Ná déan* (don't). However, in a five-syllable sentence, the majority of children could imitate only the last two syllables. This pattern of echoic imitation was also noted in other studies of language acquisition (e.g. Slobin and Welsh 1973) and probably reflects a strategy of seizing only what remains of uncomprehended utterances in short-term memory. The advantage shown by Galltacht children on this test compared to Gaeltacht children is an interesting one. It is possible that Gaeltacht children, with better comprehension of the test sentences than Galltacht children, were trying to 'answer' them in ways other than by imitation. It is also possible that Galltacht naíonra children have more practice with directed imitation of this sort than Gaeltacht children. For the purposes of the analyses in Chapter 7, the comprehension and production test results were, in the main, considered to be the most useful.

Overall, it was found that the children scored better on comprehension and imitation than on production. This is the expected pattern of development, with better ability in the early stages of acquisition to imitate and understand, before children become adept at productive use of the second language.

Table 6.6 looks at the effect of home language on the test results. This table shows that almost all children, regardless of their home language, could answer 40% of the comprehension test correctly, but whereas all of the Irish native-speakers could pass most of the items (at 75%) only about one-third of the children from English-only homes had reached this level. The production scores were more discriminating, and only half of children who heard no Irish at home, and two-thirds of those who heard some, had made at least minimal progress in production. Only a small minority of children from English-only homes, and about a quarter from homes where some Irish was used had reached mastery on the Irish production test, in passing 75% of items. Of course it must be remembered that in all groups children may not have performed up to their true

Table 6.6 Test scores by home language

	Comprehension		*Production*		*Imitation*	
Home language	*% reaching 40%*	*% reaching 75%*	*% reaching 40%*	*% reaching 75%*	*% reaching 40%*	*% reaching 75%*
English-only (N=142)	96	35	53	6	73	35
Irish and & English (N=71)	93	54	67	25	88	40
Irish only (N=12)	100	100	100	72	100	68

ability as a result of test anxiety, but every care possible was taken to ensure that children were comfortable and that they heard the dialect that was most familiar to them during testing. Nevertheless, it is accepted that testing a group of children who are as young as 3 years is difficult and will produce some performance errors. While a majority of the children from Irish-only homes reached mastery levels on production, about a quarter scored somewhere between 40% and 75% on this test[1]. Again, some children's scores may have been depressed by unfamiliarity with the test situation, and the production test, which required more volunteering of information than the more structured comprehension test, allowed for a greater influence of personal/emotional factors.

It was possible to map a field of salience for the children in the language items they comprehended and produced, with the more salient vocabulary and sentences for life in the naíonra being comprehended or produced by more children.[2] There is a cluster of items which were correctly answered by over 70% of children, while another group of items was answered correctly by only 40%. The children did well on commands and sentences which are part of naíonra routine or games, such as *sui sios* (sit down), *seas suas* (stand up), *is liomsa é!* (it's mine), *tá duine ag an doras* (there's someone at the door); these may well be formulas for the children, or unanalysed wholes which they do not use productively (Hickey 1993, Mhic Mhathúna 1993). Some items which scored well come from rhymes and songs. Others refer to body parts and this was vocabulary which the majority could produce. It is noteworthy that the central features *súil (*eye), *srón* (nose) and *béal* (mouth) scored significantly more highly than the more peripheral *gruaig* (hair) and *cluas* (ear), which appear to be less salient and were known by fewer children. Similarly in colours, the more vibrant painting and colouring terms *dearg* (red) and *buí* (yellow) were acquired by more children than *dubh* (black). Overall, those items which described naíonra objects, events or experiences which were likely to be of greater personal interest to children scored more highly, with, for example, *is liomsa é* (it's mine) being answered correctly more often than the corresponding question *cé leis é seo?* (whose is this?), and *bróga* (shoes) and *madra* (dog) scoring more highly than *gealach* (moon) or *bosca* (box).

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[1] It should be noted that this does not represent chance, since most items in the production test were open-ended.

[2] Examples of specific items here must be limited, since it is important to preserve the integrity of the test for future use.

6.7.2 General Cognitive Ability

Analysis of the scores on general cognitive ability indicated a distribution skewed towards higher ability on this test among this group. Forty-one percent of the sample scored in the top third, and 50% scored between 33% and 66%. Only 8% of the sample scored in the bottom third on this test of general cognitive ability. While it is not possible to compare these scores with those for children in other pre-school models, it is likely that they indicate some level of selection in operation, with parents being more likely to choose Irish immersion pre-schooling over mother-tongue pre-schooling if they perceive their child to be very able. The effect of general cognitive ability on progress in immersion education will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the tests developed and used in this project. Tests of Irish comprehension, production and imitation were designed. In addition, a short test of general cognitive ability was developed, complemented by a social/developmental rating by the Stiúrthóir, based on her extensive experience with the children. The sample of children was described, along with the system of weights used to ensure that the results are representative for all children in all naíonraí. Data from parents and Stiúrthóirí regarding home language also allowed the construction of weights which ensured that the weighted analyses accurately reflect the language background of all naíonraí children, not just those drawn in the sample.

The tests were found to be valid, and the reliability coefficients were found to be satisfactory. The overall results on the Irish tests showed that about half of the children answered most of the comprehension test correctly, and 95% had made at least minimal progress in comprehension (answering at least 40% of those items correctly). As expected, the children's production of Irish lagged behind their comprehension, and only 14% could accurately answer most of the production test items. Nevertheless, almost 60% had made minimal progress in Irish production. These results show that the children's Irish achievement in the naíonra is appreciable, with the overwhelming majority developing basic comprehension, and more than half having relatively advanced comprehension and a limited ability to express themselves in Irish. It is worth remembering here that these children therefore begin primary school having made significant progress in Irish acquisition already, unlike their peers who have not attended early Irish immersion.

Chapter 7

Influences on Irish Achievement

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the influences on children's Irish achievement in comprehension and production as measured by their test scores are investigated using a number of different statistical methods. Children's measured achievement would be expected to depend to some extent on their own general cognitive skills, on the language environment in their home and community, and on the particular language environment provided by the naíonra itself. Thus, the roles of individual child-level characteristics, family background and naíonra-level characteristics are explored in this chapter.

Section 7.2 shows the results of some 'bivariate' analyses, which allow for the effect of one independent variable (such as Gaeltacht/Galltacht location) on the dependent variable (e.g., production score) to be assessed. This provides some basic information on certain key determinants of test scores. It also allows comparisons with the results from Egan's (1981) study of 76 children attending naíonraí. While this information is useful in establishing a preliminary view of the influences, there are inherent limitations in bivariate analyses, because they do not take into account the interaction between independent variables. The inter-correlations between independent variables and the test scores are set out in Section 7.3.

Multivariate methods are needed in order to model more accurately the complex processes which underlie the variation in Irish achievement shown by the test scores. In Section 7.4, a number of multivariate methods are used to provide a more comprehensive view of the influences on children's production scores. The choice of production scores as the dependent variable was based on the evidence in Chapter 6, which indicated that the production score was the measure of Irish achievement which offers the best discrimination between high and low achievers. A hierarchical regression analysis, based on a logical ordering of the variables, is used to examine the relative role of key variables at child, family and naíonra-level. Some lines of inquiry suggested by this analysis are pursued using multiple regression analyses in which all variables are entered simultaneously. The structure of the data set, which is based on a sample of children drawn from 25 naíonraí, imposes particular limitations on the investigation of 'naíonra-level' effects. These limitations are investigated using a 'multi-level model', which takes explicit account of the different units of analysis involved (child and naíonra-levels). The

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final section (7.5) discusses these results in the light of other research and draws together the conclusions from the analyses contained in the chapter.

7.2 BIVARIATE ANALYSES

A simple indication of the influence of a given variable on children's test scores can be gained by focusing simply on the mean scores for children with different values of that variable. For example, consider the distinction between three-year olds and four-year-olds. In order to answer the question, 'Do older children score better in the tests than younger children?', one could simply compare the average score for the older group with that of younger children. The mean scores, as set out in Table 7.1 below, show that older children do indeed score higher than younger children, on average. A t-test of the differences between the mean scores indicates that, taking into account the sample sizes for the two sub-groups, a difference of this size would only arise by chance on fewer than 1 in 1000 occasions if the true, but unobserved means were in fact equal. Technically, this is expressed by saying that the significance level is 'less than 0.001', or $p < 0.001$. A smaller difference in means (or smaller sample sizes) might result in a difference which would not be regarded as statistically significant - the usual cut-off being a significance level of 5% (.05). Thus, if the difference could emerge by chance on more than 5 in every 100 occasions, it is not regarded as statistically significant.

Egan (1981) performed t-tests of this type in examining the impact of a number of different influences. For comparative purposes, we re-examine these findings here. As explained in Chapter 6, the sample for the present study was drawn in such a way that it could be weighted to be representative of the population of naíonra children: these weights are used in the bivariate analyses undertaken in the present section. It is of particular interest to know whether the results found in Egan's survey are confirmed or contradicted by those based on the more systematic and representative sample of naíonraí used in this study; although it is also possible that differences in results may arise because of changes in the population of children attending naíonraí between 1981 and 1993.

One further statistical point merits attention before turning to the results of these bivariate analyses. Given the use of a 5% significance level to indicate statistical significance, the laws of probability suggest that one may find approximately 5 'significant' results (or 'false positives') in a series of 100 t-tests. No correction for this is applied here, but the point should be borne in mind. However, it is one of the reasons for carrying out multivariate analyses (reported later in this chapter), which have the merit of taking more than two variables into account at a time.

7.2.1 Age

Egan (1981) noted that the older children in her sample had significantly more correct responses in her tests of Irish achievement. Table 7.1 shows that, in the present study, Table 7. 1 Relationship between age and comprehension and production scores

Mean Scores (%)	3-year-olds (N=81)	4-year-olds (N=137)	2-tail significance
Comprehension	63.2	72.5	<.001
Production	40.1	53.2	<.001

four-year-olds also scored significantly higher than three-year-olds, both on the comprehension and production tests. Daniels (1995:169) noted that 'there is a great deal of research to suggest that older children produce higher test results than younger children in the same class'. Bell and Daniels (1990) noted that this may be confounded with length of schooling, but they claim that their analysis showed that it is the age position of the child within the class which was the main explanatory factor for this performance difference. In the present study, both age-groups had higher comprehension test scores than production scores, and older children scored higher on both comprehension and production than younger children. This result points to older children's greater maturational development, and their increased metalinguistic skills, which aid second language acquisition. It is also the case that four-year-olds are more likely to be able to perform to the best of their ability in a test situation than three-year-olds, who are likely to be more dependent on communicative context and less comfortable in a test. Age itself is highly correlated with another maturational variable, general cognitive ability, and, in fact, the multivariate statistical analysis reported in Section 7.4 shows that the age effect does not remain significant when other factors, including general cognitive ability, are entered into the equation. This result will be discussed in the light of the regression analysis.

7.2.2. Sex

Table 7.2 presents the t-test for sex differences.

Table 7. 2 Relationship between sex and comprehension and production scores

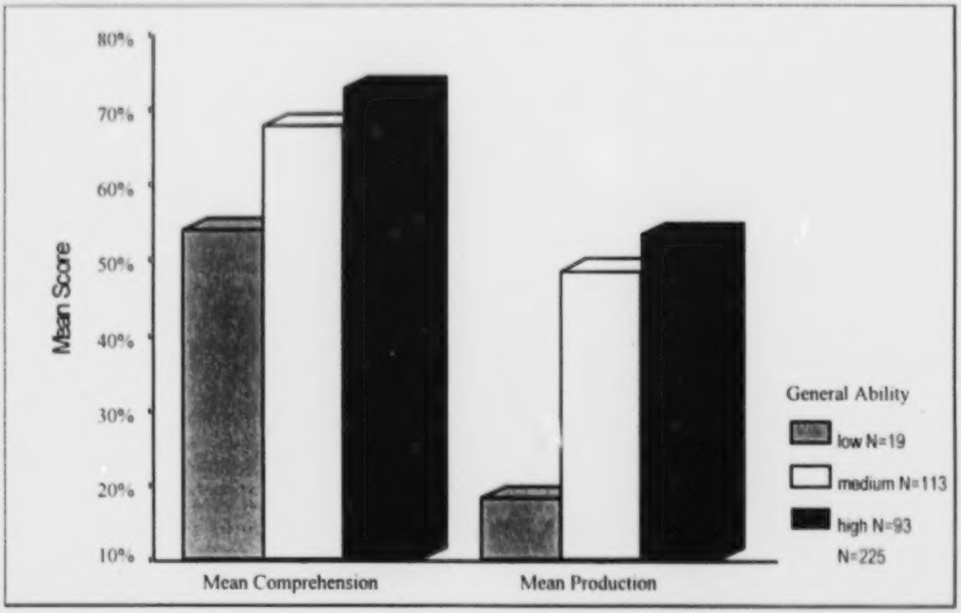
Mean Scores (%)	*Boys N=113*	*Girls N=112*	*2-tail significance*
Comprehension	66.3	71.4	<.05
Production	46.7	49.6	NS

The girls in the sample were found to score significantly higher on the comprehension test than did the boys. However, there was no was no significant difference in production scores. The multivariate analysis found that there was no significant effect for sex when other factors were controlled for. Therefore this marginal advantage for the girls should not be over-interpreted.

7.2.3 General Cognitive Ability

Although Egan (1981) collected questionnaire evidence of children's social, motor and cognitive development, it is not possible to compare our data on general cognitive ability and competence in Irish with the Egan survey because she did not directly measure the effect of differences in general ability on children's Irish achievement. Figure 7.1 suggests that the effect of general ability is more evident on production scores than on comprehension. The multivariate analyses indicated that general cognitive ability was strongly predictive of success on the production test, and that result will be discussed further in Section 7.5.

Figure 7.1 General cognitive ability and comprehension and production scores



7.2.4 Galltacht/Gaeltacht

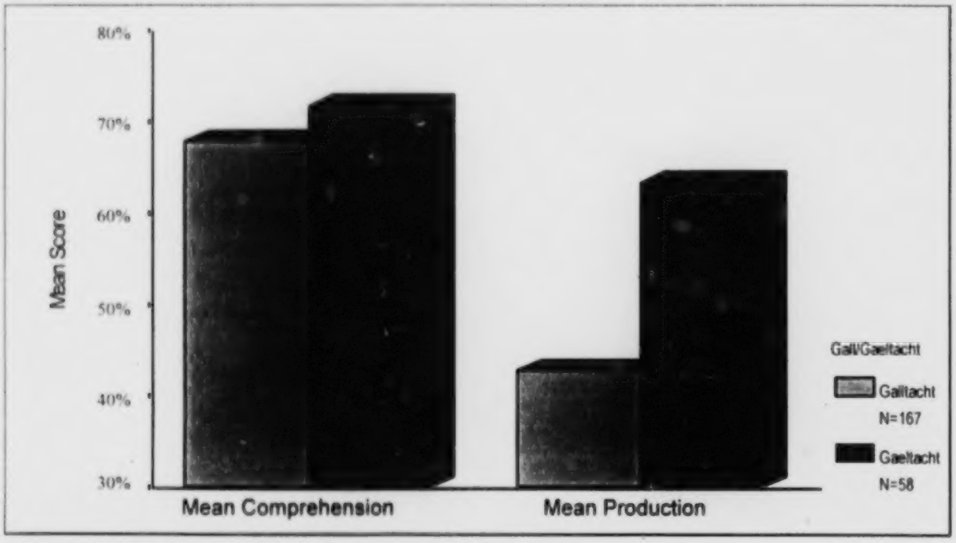
Table 7.3 presents the t-test result on the relationship between residence in the Gaeltacht or Galltacht and Irish test scores, in order to replicate Egan's test for this effect. These results, which are illustrated in Figure 7.2, are in line with the expectation that Gaeltacht children would be at an advantage compared to Galltacht children as a result of their greater exposure to Irish in their homes and community.

Table 7.3 Relationship between Galltacht/Gaeltacht residence and Irish tests scores

Mean Scores (%)	*Galltacht N=167*	*Gaeltacht N=58*	*2-tail significance*
Comprehension	67.8	71.8	NS
Production	42.8	63.4	<.001

The lack of a significant difference in the comprehension scores of Galltacht and Gaeltacht children (although there was a non-significant tendency for higher Gaeltacht scores) suggests considerable gains even by children in English-speaking areas in their understanding of Irish in the naíonra, but may also point to a 'ceiling effect' operating on the comprehension test. This arises because the comprehension test was constructed more with the L2 learner in mind, in order to obtain data about the most likely progress this group would make in acquiring the language. For this reason, it contained a relatively small number of more difficult items (the average score being 69%). Thus, it may have been difficult for the Gaeltacht children to display their superiority in comprehension, which might emerge in a test which included a greater number of relatively difficult items.

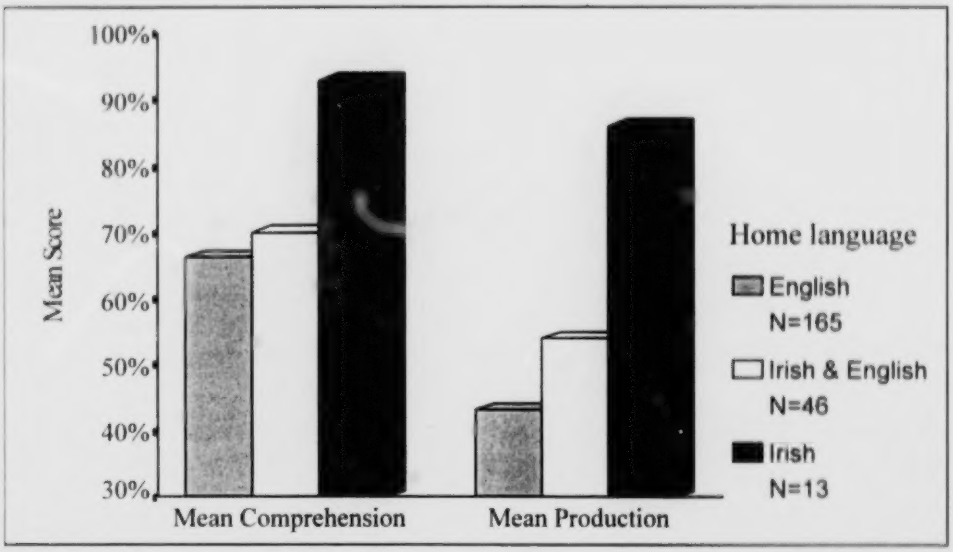
Figure 7.2 Galltacht/Gaeltacht residence and comprehension and production scores



The results show a significant advantage in production scores for the children in Gaeltacht naíonraí compared to those in English-speaking districts. Egan (1981) found instead that the 49 children she tested in Galltacht naíonraí had more correct Irish responses and fewer error responses than her sample of 27 Gaeltacht children. However, this may have been the result of a sampling bias in her study, whereby the relatively small number of Gaeltacht children tested were by chance not as good as the general population of Gaeltacht children. The results of the present study, showing that the children in Gaeltacht naíonraí had significantly higher production scores than those in Galltacht naíonraí, are in line with the expectation that exposure to community use of the language is beneficial.

It must be remembered that not all children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí come from Irish-speaking homes. In fact, as Fig. 4.1 showed, over one-third of children attending Gaeltacht naíonraí come from English-speaking homes, and a further two-fifths from Irish and English homes. Bivariate analyses of home language were carried out to assess the effect of these variables. Figure 7.3 shows the effect of home language on the children's Irish test scores.

Figure 7.3 Home language and comprehension and production scores



T-tests showed that children from Irish-only and bilingual homes scored significantly higher than those from English-only homes on the production test (p<.001 for the former and p<.004 for the latter). Children from Irish-speaking homes also had significantly higher comprehension scores than those from English-speaking homes (p<.001). Children from Irish-medium homes had significantly higher comprehension (p<.001) and production scores (p<.001) than children from bilingual homes. Thus, these results are in line with expectations, with evidence of a continuum of advantage in terms of Irish test scores for children from Irish-medium to bilingual homes over children from English-medium homes. Egan's (1981) results were less clear-cut, with children from Irish-speaking homes doing no better on some measures than bilingual children, although, in terms of correct spoken responses the trend in her results, as in the present study, was for children from bilingual homes to achieve higher scores than those from English-only homes, and children from Irish-only homes to achieve higher scores than those from bilingual homes.

It is of interest to examine the effect of home language on the children's production of picture descriptions. The results from one such item are presented in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.4 Home language and children's language use in picture description

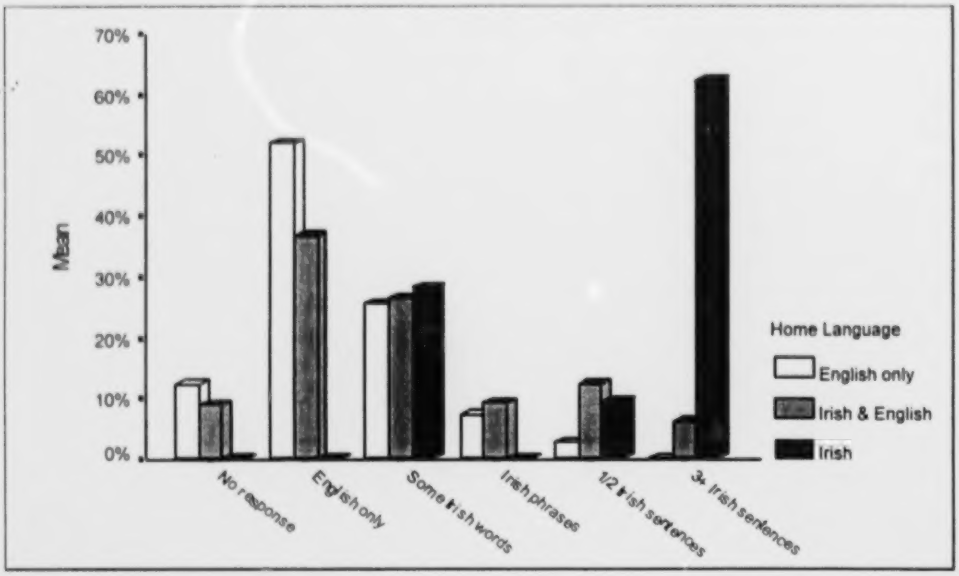


Fig. 7.4 shows that only about a third of the children from English-speaking homes responded to the request to describe a picture of a naíonra-like scene with some Irish in their response; about two-thirds produced English only or remained silent; about a quarter produced a few Irish words; less than a tenth were able to produce some Irish phrases or broken sentences and only a small minority could produce some Irish sentences and a list of words.

In contrast, over half of the responses of the children from bilingual homes were in Irish and showed a wider spread of Irish response types; roughly a third used a few words of Irish; about a tenth produced some Irish phrases and more than a tenth were able to produce a couple of Irish sentences and a list of words.

Finally, all the children from Irish-only homes produced Irish responses to the task; almost three-quarters of these children could describe the picture using Irish sentences, while the remainder produced only a few words in Irish, but none used English or gave no response. It must be expected that with children as young as 3 or 4 years, some reluctance and test-shyness could depress results, particularly on an item which requires more output from the child. Thus, a proportion of the responses which fell into the three lowest categories in particular ('no response' 'English only' and 'some Irish words') should be interpreted as reflecting the child's preferred mode of dealing with the task, and may therefore underestimate those children's Irish ability. This problem holds for any test of young children, where test anxiety may cause children to under-perform. Nevertheless, the evidence of an advantage for bilinguals over children from English homes is clear, and the advantage for children from Irish-speaking homes over both bilinguals and English speakers in even more pronounced.

7.2.5 Home Language by Galltacht/Gaeltacht

Egan went on to look at the interaction of home language with Galltacht/Gaeltacht location. This provides some information on the effect of community language, while controlling for the impact of home language, and is therefore of interest. Table 7.4 presents the two-way analyses of these results, using the weighted sample.

Table 7.4 shows that children from English-only homes in the Gaeltacht had significantly higher scores in the Irish production test than those from English-only homes living in English-speaking districts, although there was no significant difference between the groups on the Irish comprehension test. This result was replicated for children from homes in which English and Irish were spoken, with the bilingual children in the Gaeltacht having significantly higher production scores, though their comprehension scores did not differ significantly from the Galltacht children's. Comparisons between children from Irish-only homes in the Galltacht and Gaeltacht were not possible, because of the very low number in this category for the Galltacht, as in Egan's study.

These results point to the beneficial effect of exposure to Irish in the Gaeltacht community even for children whose home language is English only, as well as for children from bilingual homes. This effect may be a simple input frequency effect, with residence in the Gaeltacht increasing input and affording opportunities to speak the language, but alongside input frequency and usage goes the fact that the language has a visibly higher status in the Gaeltacht than in the Galltacht, which is likely also to affect motivation. These results differ from Egan's, who found an unexpected advantage for Galltacht English-speakers over Gaeltacht children from English-only homes. Given the differences in sampling procedures and sample sizes, the results in the present

Table 7.4 Relationship between home language, community language and Irish scores

Home Language	*Galltacht/Gaeltacht*	*Comprehension (Mean %)*	*Production (Mean %)*
English only	Galltacht (N=142)[1]	67.3	41.8
	Gaeltacht (N=23)	61.2	52.2
	2-tailed significance	*NS*	*.04*
Irish and English	Galltacht (N=23)	69.2	46.1
	Gaeltacht (N=23)	70.9	61.8
	2-tailed significance	*NS*	*.03*
Irish only	Galltacht (N=1)	90.3	71.0
	Gaeltacht (N=12)	93.6	87.9
	2-tailed significance	*n.a.*	*n.a.*

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[1] Weighted test sample.

study, showing a positive effect on Irish production of Gaeltacht residence for children of all language backgrounds, are more likely to be representative.

7.2.6 Stiúrthóir's Irish

Egan found that children in a naíonra with a Stiúrthóir who was not a native speaker of Irish out-performed those with a native speaker Stiúrthóir. In the present study there was no significant difference between the scores of children who had a native or a non-native speaker Stiúrthóir. A re-analysis which grouped 'native speaker' with 'native-speaker-like' found that the children who had Stiúrthóirí at this higher level of Irish competence had significantly higher production scores. The effect of this variable was tested initially by t-test, as is presented in the 'Full sample' section of Table 7.5.

An examination of the effect of Stiúrthóir's Irish by Galltacht/Gaeltacht location found that in Galltacht naíonraí, the children with a native speaker Stiúrthóir or a Stiúrthóir with native-speaker-like competence had significantly higher comprehension scores. There was a tendency for these children also to have higher production scores, but this result was not found to be statistically significant. In Gaeltacht naíonraí there was no effect of differences in the Irish competence of Stiúrthóirí, because all Gaeltacht Stiúrthóirí in the sample had at least native-speaker-like competence in Irish.

Overall, these results emphasise that the important distinction is not between native speakers and the rest, but between Stiúrthóirí with high levels of competence and those with moderate or lower levels of competence. Thus, the children whose Stiúrthóir has native-like competence in Irish have the same advantage as those whose Stiúrthóir is a native speaker. In practical terms this means that all Stiúrthóirí, whether native speakers

Table 7.5 Irish competence in Stiúrthóir and comprehension and production scores

	Full sample (N=25)		
	Native-like (N=15)	*Non-native-like (N=10)*	*Significance*
Comprehension	74.6	65.1	NS
Production	59.7	42.5	.03
	Galltacht only (N=17)		
	Native-like (N=7)	*Non-native-like (N=10)*	*Significance*
Comprehension	80.6	65.1	.02
Production	57.6	42.5	NS

or not, can aspire to the highest levels of Irish achievement among the children in their naíonraí, provided that they themselves have reached a high level of Irish competence.

7.2.7 Location

Table 7.6 presents the mean scores for children from naíonraí in different locations.

Table 7.6 Naíonra location and comprehension and production scores

Naíonra located in:	*Comprehension mean scores*	*Production mean scores*
private house (N=6)	78.1	62.0
hall/public building (N=8)	77.1	62.0
ordinary school (N=4)	46.0	27.2
other (N=1)	71.4	56.4
all-Irish/Gaeltacht school (N=6)	70.0	43.3

Bivariate analyses found that there was a significant effect of location on comprehension scores only between naíonraí located in ordinary schools and all other locations. Thus, it appears that children in naíonraí located in ordinary schools in the sample performed significantly less well on the comprehension test than all other locations for naíonraí. This can be summarised as follows:

Average comprehension score for naíonraí in:		
homes halls all-Irish/Gaeltacht schools	>	ordinary schools

With regard to production scores, it was found that the scores of children in naíonraí located in ordinary schools and all-Irish/Gaeltacht schools did not differ significantly, but there was a significant difference between these groups and the home- and hall-based naíonra attenders. This is summarised as follows:

Average production score for naíonraí in:		
private homes halls	>	ordinary schools and all-Irish/Gaeltacht

There was no significant difference between children in naíonraí located in ordinary schools and in all-Irish/Gaeltacht schools on production, but all other locations had significantly higher production scores than the naíonraí in schools.

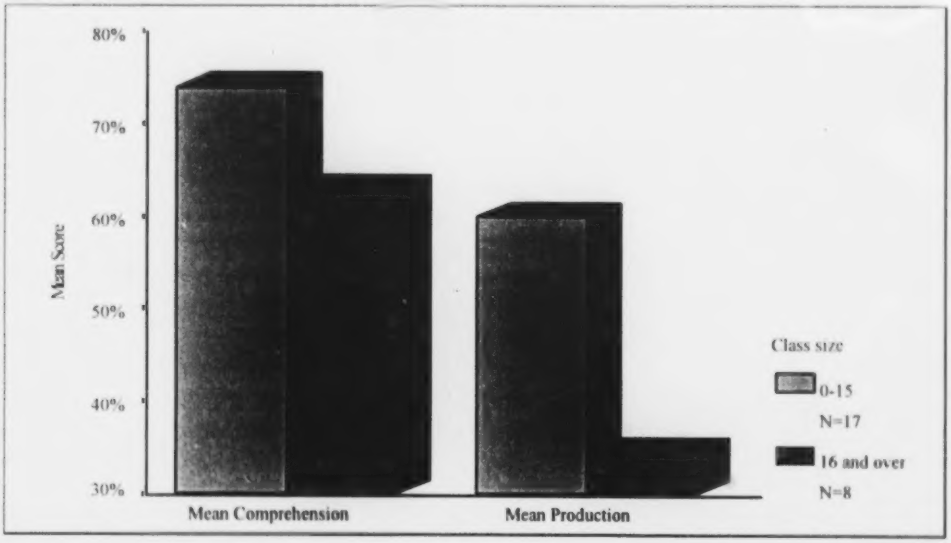
Overall, then the outcome of the t-tests showed that naíonraí in private homes and halls or other public buildings had higher scores on comprehension and production than those in ordinary schools. Naíonraí located in all-Irish/Gaeltacht schools occupied a middle position, in having comprehension results which were on a par with the home and hall naíonraí and better than those located in ordinary schools, but in having production scores which did not differ significantly from those located in ordinary schools and which were lower than the production scores for home- and hall-based naíonraí.

Egan (1981) found that the children in naíonraí in private homes had higher scores than those in all-Irish schools, who in turn did better than those in naíonraí held in halls, who, in turn, did better than children in naíonraí in hotels, and finally hotel naíonraí attenders did better than those attending a naíonra in an ordinary school. However, Egan's study had only had 2 naíonraí in some of those categories. The results in this study partly replicate Egan's, in finding that children in naíonraí in ordinary schools performed significantly less well than those in other locations. However, in the present case there was no clear advantage for home-based naíonraí over other locations, but an indication that school-based naíonraí do appear to be at a disadvantage compared to other locations in terms of Irish production scores. This immediately raises the question of a possible interaction with class size, since, as the next section shows, children in larger naíonraí perform less well on the tests. Another interaction would be with Galltacht/Gaeltacht residence, since we know that Gaeltacht naíonraí are smaller on average than those in the Galltacht. This interaction of naíonra location with class size and other variables will be controlled for in the regression analysis and the effect of this variable will be discussed in light of those results.

7.2.8 Class Size

The effect of class size on children's Irish scores is illustrated in Figure 7.5. There is some evidence from the literature that the total class size has as important an influence on children's achievement as the pupil-teacher ratio (e.g. Howes, Phillips and Whitebrook (1990), Blatchford and Mortimore (1994)). According to Howes *et al.* (1990), the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (FIDCR) specify that class sizes for pre-school children aged between 37 and 54 months years should be no more than 18, and pupil-teacher ratios should be no more than 9:1 (In fact, the California licensing standard (CA) for pre-school-age children specifies a more stringent ratio of no more than 8:1). Thus, tests of the relationship between class size and Irish achievement were also carried out. Naíonraí were categorised as 'small' for this analysis if they contained up to 15 children, and 'large' if they contained 16 or more children.

Fig. 7.5 Class size and mean comprehension and production scores (full sample)



Children in naíonraí which had more than 16 children did significantly less well ($p<.001$) on the test of Irish production, compared to children in groups of up to 15 children. Since larger groups are more likely to be found in Galltacht rather than Gaeltacht areas (and all the 'large' groups in the sample were in the Galltacht) a further test was carried out to investigate the differential effect of class size within Galltacht naíonraí only, as is shown in Table 7.7. Both comprehension and production scores were significantly lower in large naíonraí of more than 16 children in the Galltacht. However, since the overall size

Table 7.7 Relationship between class size and mean Irish scores in Galltacht naíonraí

Irish test	*Class size*		*Significance*
	'Small' naíonra (low-15) (N=9)	*'Large' naíonra (16-high) (N=8)*	
Comprehension	78.3	62.2	p<.01
Production	58.9	33.4	p<.001

may be offset by having adult assistants in larger naíonraí, the relationship between pupil-teacher ratio and Irish achievement was also examined in the bivariate analyses. In addition, the multivariate analyses reported in Section 7.5.8 allow us to assess the effect of class size while other variables such as pupil-teacher ratio are controlled for.

7.2.9 Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The relationship between pupil-teacher ratio and Irish achievement was analysed first by t-tests for comparability with Egan's results. Egan found that children in naíonraí with small pupil-teacher ratios (from 6:1 to 10:1) did not differ significantly from those with large ratios (11:1 to 17:1) in terms of their number of incorrect and correct responses on her Irish tests. However, she found that children in small ratio naíonraí produced significantly more Irish responses than those in large ratio groups.

In the present study pupil-teacher ratio was split into 'low', defined as 'up to and including 10 children per adult' and 'high', defined as 'more than 10'. Eighteen of the 25 test naíonraí were found to have 'low' pupil-teacher ratios, while 7 had 'high'. The results presented in Table 7.8 overleaf show that, while there was a tendency for children in naíonraí with high pupil-teacher ratios to have lower scores, these differences were not significant, either in comprehension or production.

Since there are more naíonraí with higher pupil-teacher ratios in the Galltacht than in the Gaeltacht, analysis of the test naíonraí in the Galltacht was carried out separately. Again, a tendency was found for children in groups with larger pupil-teacher ratios to have lower scores, but these differences were not statistically significant.

Taking these results on class size and pupil-teacher ratios together, it would appear from the bivariate analyses that there is a significant relationship between class size *per se* and children's production scores, and that this negative relationship is apparently not offset by improving the pupil-teacher ratio in the group. However, only multivariate analysis controlling for other variables which may interact with class size and pupil-teacher ratio can fully assess their relationship with the children's Irish scores. This issue is investigated further using such multivariate techniques in Section 7.4.

Table 7.8 Relationship between pupil-teacher ratio and Irish scores

Irish test	*Pupil-Teacher ratio* *'Low' (up to 10)* *(N=18)*	 *'High' (over 10)* *(N=7)*	*Significance*
Comprehension	71.5	67.8	NS
Production	55.2	43.5	NS

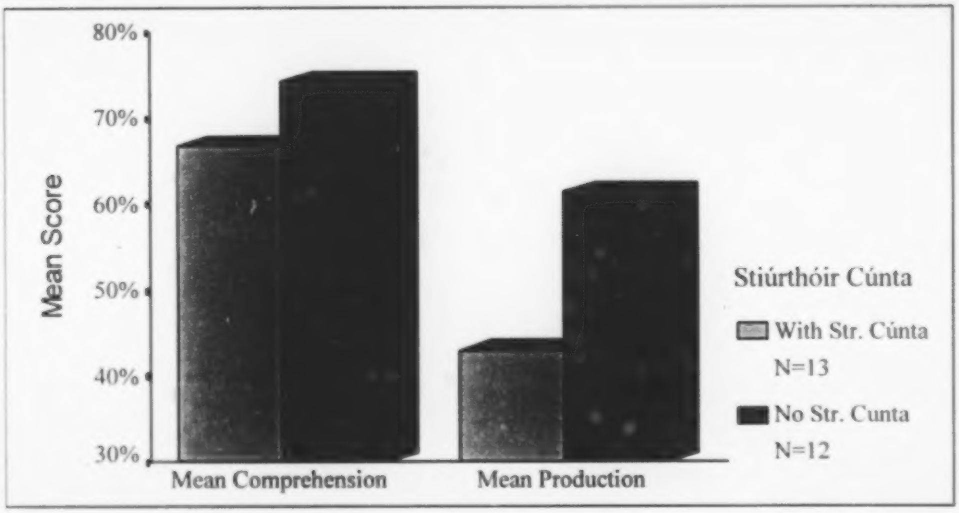
7.2.10 Number of Supervisors in Naíonra

Egan examined the effect of having more than one Stiúrthóir in a naíonra, in addition to looking at pupil-teacher ratio. She found that children in groups which had only one Stiúrthóir gave significantly more spoken Irish responses and fewer English responses than those in groups with more than one. For the sake of comparability with Egan's study, therefore, this variable is also investigated in the bivariate analysis (although it was found to be too closely linked to pupil-teacher ratio to be included in the multivariate analysis). In their questionnaire Stiúrthóirí were asked to indicate whether they had an assistant (entitled either 'Comhstiúrthóir' or 'Stiúrthóir Cúnta'). In the test sample, 13 naíonraí had two Stiúrthóirí, or one Stiúrthóir and an Assistant, while 12 had only one Stiúrthóir. The results of the t-test on the children's comprehension and production scores in one-Stiúrthóir and two-Stiúrthóir groups are illustrated in Figure 7.6. The results show that children in a naíonra with only one Stiúrthóir had significantly higher ($p<.01$) production scores than those with a Stiúrthóir and an assistant, or two co-leaders.

In discussing her results on this variable Egan (1981) cited Tizard, Philips and Plewis's (1976) suggestion that two supervisors may spend a proportion of their time talking to each other rather than to the children, thus lessening their input to the children. Mhic Mhathúna (1993) also noted that not all of the conversations between Stiúrthóirí was available to children. Smith *et al.* (1989) found that increasing the number of adults can lead to more talk among adults than talk to children. This is of particular importance in early immersion education: when children depend on the adult in the naíonra to provide them with L2 input, then adult-adult interactions substituted for adult-child interactions may constitute a reduction in valuable L2 input to the children.

A further factor of relevance in assessing the impact of more than one Stiúrthóir in a naíonra is the level of Irish competence of the co-worker. As Table 5.3 showed, Comhairleoirí assessed the Irish competence of Stiúrthóirí Cúnta and reported that a substantial proportion of assistants (29%) had Irish which rated as 'weak' or 'improving' only, and a further 14% rated as 'satisfactory'. Thus, almost half of all assistants had Irish which rated lower than 'good'.

Fig. 7.6 Presence of a Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir and comprehension and production scores



Egan (1981) suggested that in some cases, Stiúrthóirí and their co-workers might be resorting to English, because of these lower levels of Irish competence. This would have the effect, not only of reducing the amount of Irish heard in the children's environment (even if not directed at them), but also of providing children with a model of code-switching to English. While there is no direct evidence of this in the present data set, the proportion of assistants with weak Irish competence would suggest that English might have to be used occasionally between adults, at least for some managerial interactions.

Overall, therefore, it cannot be assumed that employing another adult in the naíonra is a simple remedy for large groups, since there remains the problem of the Irish competence of the assistant. The possible connection between having an assistant and the negative impact of large class sizes must be acknowledged, and this connection is controlled for in the multivariate analyses later in this chapter. The result which emerges is that improving the pupil-teacher ratio by the addition of another adult does not counteract the negative relationship between large groups and Irish production test scores.

7.2.11 Permanence of Location

Not all naíonraí are located in dedicated premises, with the result that some Stiúrthóirí have to remove their materials and equipment regularly to make way for other groups. Almost 20% of Stiúrthóirí have to remove evidence of the naíonra each day, and a further 8% must do so every few days. In the test sample, 21 naíonraí were in permanent, dedicated locations, while the remaining 4 were non-permanent. While there was a tendency for children in permanent locations to have higher production and comprehension scores than those in non-permanent locations, this difference did not reach statistical significance. This result differs from Egan's who found an advantage for permanent naíonraí in her 1981 study. However, given that the number in the non-permanent category in the present sample was small (and may have been low also in Egan's study, although no cell numbers were given for non-permanent locations in her sample), this result should be interpreted cautiously. Undoubtedly, Stiúrthóirí would prefer to have a permanent setting for their naíonra, but those who cannot find such a setting need not, on the basis of this preliminary analysis of this factor, be unduly concerned about the impact of their non-permanence on the children's progress.

7.3 CORRELATION MATRIX

Table 7.9 presents first-order Pearson product-moment correlations between achievement on the Irish tests and a number of predictor variables which relate to the children's language background, age, sex, general cognitive ability scores, and a range of naíonra-level factors such as the Stiúrthóir's Irish, and the number of children in the naíonra. Any coefficient of correlation that is not zero and that is also statistically significant denotes some degree of relationship between two variables. The weights described in Chapter 6 were used in computing these calculations, to ensure that the figures presented here represent, as fully as possible, the relations between the variables which pertain to the population of naíonra children.

While the set of variables included in the analysis covers a wide range of possible influences on children's Irish achievement, there are a number of other variables which could potentially be relevant, particularly at naíonra-level, such as details of the activities and teaching methods used in the naíonraí. There are, however, severe limitations on the number of effects that a data set of this type can reasonably be expected to identify. The total number of naíonraí included in the test sample is 25, which may be sufficient to identify four or five naíonra-level effects; the inclusion of more variables than this is likely to lead to results which are highly distorted, as the naíonra-level coefficients can then be highly sensitive to one or two observations. For this reason, the multivariate analysis of naíonra-level effects concentrates on a small number of key variables (Galltacht/Gaeltacht location, Stiúrthóir's Irish ability, an indicator for naíonraí located in schools, the number of children in the session, and the pupil/teacher ratio). As the analysis will show, these variables can, in any event, account for a very high proportion of the variance in test scores at naíonra-level.

Table 7.9 shows the correlations between scores on the Irish tests and various other variables relating to the child (e.g. age, sex), the child's home (e.g. parents' Irish ability, Irish use in home, number of children in home who had previously or were contemporaneously attending a naíonra/all-Irish school), and the particular naíonra attended (e.g. Stiúrthóir's Irish, its location, number of children in session and PTR).

Table 7.9 Pearson's product-moment correlations between Irish achievement and a number of predictor variables relating to background

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 Production																
2 Comprehension	.77**															
3 Imitation	.54**	.60**														
4 Age	.21**	.23**	.22**													
5 Sex	.06	.14*	.18**	-.06												
6 General Cognitive Ability	.32**	.29**	.49**	.34**	.11											
7 Parents' Irish ability	.32**	.38**	.21**	.06	.16*	.03										
8 No. siblings Irish med. ed	.32**	.26**	.10	.01	-.02	-.18*	.38**									
9 Home language Irish	.39**	.34**	.24**	-.03	.08	-.17**	.35**	.32**								
10 Home lang. Irish & Eng.	.13	.04	.11	-.05	.16*	.05	.39**	.16*	-.13							
11 Current Irish use	.36**	.32**	.18*	-.03	-.01	-.01	.39**	.17*	.57**	.05						
12 Period in naionra	.01	.03	.02	.26**	-.01	.12	.04	-.18*	-.08	.03	-.06					
13 Gaeltacht	.37**	.10	-.06	.04	-.04	-.16*	.30**	.44**	.37**	.27**	.31**	-.04				
14 Stiurthoir's Irish	.47**	.35**	.18**	-.04	-.01	-.03	.14	.27**	.13	.11	.15*	-.21**	.29**			
15 School location	-.55**	-.42**	-.14*	.04	-.10	.01	-.08	-.14	-.17*	-.11	-.12	.10	-.17**	-.43**		
16 No. children in session	-.50**	-.33**	-.07	.07	-.10	.06	-.22**	-.26**	-.21**	-.18**	-.29**	.03	-.62**	-.47**	.53**	
17 Pupil-teacher ratio	-.25**	-.12	-.04	.03	-.01	.08	-.11	-.14*	-.01	-.15*	-.11	.03	-.38**	-.29**	.29**	.73**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16

** = significant at .01 level or below   * = significant at .05 level or below

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Concentrating on the scores in the children's Irish production test, (column 1), which appears to be the most discriminating index of the children's Irish achievement, we see that all of the variables listed are significantly correlated with production, with the exception of sex, home language Irish/English and period in naíonra. The factors which were most significantly correlated with production were (listed in order of appearance in Table 7.11):

> Comprehension, Imitation, Age, General cognitive ability, Parents' Irish ability, Number of children in family who had previously or were contemporaneously attending a naíonra or all-Irish school, Irish as home language[1], Current use of Irish in the home[2], Gaeltacht location, Stiúrthóir's Irish, Location (negative correlation with school location), Number of children in the naíonra session, Pupil-teacher ratio.

To summarise these correlation results: children who scored highly on the production test tended to have high scores on:

Child-level variables
- Comprehension (r= .77**)
- Imitation (r=.54**)
- General cognitive ability (r=.32**)
- Age (r=.21**)

Home-level variables
- Parents with high Irish ability (r=.32**)
- Irish as home language (r=.39**)
- More frequent current use of Irish in home (r=.36**)
- Siblings attending a naíonra or all-Irish school (r=.32**)

Naíonra-level variables
- Stiúrthóir with good or native-like competence in Irish (r=.47**)
- Naíonra based in location other than a school (|r| = .55**)
- Smaller naíonra (|r| = .50**)
- Naíonra with a lower PTR (|r| =.25**)
- Gaeltacht naíonra (r=.37**)

Table 7.9 also showed, as would be expected, that general cognitive ability scores correlate (.34**) with age (i.e. older children do better on this test). Parents' socio-economic status has been found in other research (e.g. Osborn and Milbank 1987:103) to explain a significant amount of variance in children's cognitive and educational test scores, with a tendency for parents with higher educational levels and socio-economic status to have children with higher general ability. The low negative correlation between general cognitive ability and 'home language Irish' may, therefore, be due to the lower average socio-economic status of rural Gaeltacht residents. The negative relationship between number of siblings and general cognitive ability has also been noted in international research (e.g. Osborn and Milbank 1987:208).

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[1] 'Irish as home language' was based on parents' answers to the question 'what language(s) were mainly spoken to this child as a baby and toddler?' in their questionnaire wherever possible, but when this was unavailable (when parents did not complete their questionnaire) this was based on the Stiúrthóir's report on the home language of each child in the Census. When both were available, there was a high correspondence between the parents' and Stiúrthóir's report.

[2] 'Current use in home' was a scaled variable from the parents' questionnaire, which asked: 'Now, how often is Irish used between yourself and your children?' The categories were: 'always,' 'regularly,' 'sometimes' and 'never'.

As anticipated, 'home language Irish' was significantly correlated with Gaeltacht residence (r=.37**) and it was also negatively correlated with naíonra size and with location in a school. Similarly, 'home language Irish and English' was also significantly associated with Gaeltacht residence. The significant negative correlations between the number of children in the session and Irish as home language points to the tendency for Gaeltacht naíonraí to be smaller. Larger naíonraí were also less likely to have a native speaker Stiúrthóir. Gaeltacht naíonraí in this sample were significantly associated with high Irish ability among Stiúrthóirí, and were less likely than Galltacht naíonraí to be located in a school, have large numbers of children or a high PTR. Children repeating a year in the naíonra were less likely to have a Stiúrthóir with native-like Irish competence.

Parents' reports of Irish use in the home correlates significantly with Parents' Irish ability and with the number of siblings in Irish-medium education. Parental ability also correlated, as expected, with Gaeltacht residence.

The complex pattern of significant intercorrelations between the predictor (independent) variables clearly indicate the limitations of the bivariate analysis in Section 7.2, which, while useful in pointing out individual effects, cannot control for these intercorrelations. This problem underlines the need for multivariate analyses, to which we now turn.

7.4 REGRESSION ANALYSES AND MULTI-LEVEL MODELLING

This section will present the multivariate analyses of the influences on children's production test scores. Three main methods of analysis are used: hierarchical regression, simultaneous multiple regression, and a multi-level model.[1] In this sub-section, the rationale underlying these methods is set out briefly. The results of each method are presented in turn in each of the following sub-sections. Section 7.5 goes on to discuss the results in a more general way, noting links to relevant findings from other research.

Multiple regression analysis was developed for the behavioural sciences around the turn of the century to allow the study of natural covariation of observed characteristics of samples of subjects. Cohen and Cohen (1975) define multiple regression/correlation (MRC) analysis as:

---

[1] While arguments can be made in favour of either unweighted or weighted regressions in a case such as this, the use of unweighted data is preferred on balance, as the interest is in a structural relationship, which would not be affected by the use of weights.

> a highly general and therefore very flexible data-analytic system that may be used whenever a quantitative variable (the dependent variable) is to be studied as a function of, or in relationship to, any factors of interest (expressed as independent variables)......The greatest virtue of the MRC system is its capacity to mirror, with high fidelity, the complexity of the relationships that characterise the behavioral sciences.
>
> Cohen and Cohen (1975: 5-7)

As noted in the discussion of the bivariate analyses, the advantage of regression analysis is that, unlike the Pearson product moment correlation coefficients in Table 7.9, it takes account of the relationships between predictors. There are various types of multiple regression analysis. In the simultaneous model, all the independent variables are entered into the equation at the same time, on the assumption that no variable has any logical priority over another, either in terms of a hypothetical causal structure of the data, or in terms of its relevance to the research goals. An alternative strategy is one in which the independent variables are entered cumulatively according to some specified hierarchy which is dictated in advance by the logic of the research. Once the order of entry has been determined, this allows for a partitioning of the total variance accounted for by the variables entered. Hierarchical regression therefore allows us to assess the successive effects of the different predictors on the dependent variable. The increase in R^2 as each variable is entered in the equation can be interpreted in terms of the additional criterion variance which can be accounted for after the effects of the previously entered variables have been removed. This deals with the problem of interconnections between variables, which means that the variance explained by each predictor is unlikely to be unique.

Since the increment in the explained variance attributed to a particular variable may change, depending on its position in the hierarchy of variables, the basis on which the hierarchy is determined is therefore of great importance. Cohen and Cohen (1975:98) suggest several different rationales, but note that these may be combined in determining the order of independent variables in actual research. They state that the most straightforward use of the hierarchical model is when a logically determined causal priority can be assigned, such as sex coming before an attitudinal variable. Another method is to use correlation coefficients to determine the order of variable entry. In the hierarchical regression reported below, logical considerations determine the order of entry, with variables considered logically prior, such as 'child-level' factors like age and sex, being entered before 'naíonra-level' factors such as number of children in the group.

Multi-level models are a more recent development. They can be regarded as a form of regression which is tailored to deal with data sets such as the current one, where the independent variables arise from different units or 'levels' of analysis. Home level variables affect each child individually, but naíonra-level variables, such as class size, affect the group of children from each naíonra.

7.4.1 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

The order of entry of variables into the hierarchical regression equation was determined by logical considerations. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 7.10. A key consideration in the research is whether a variable is measured at 'child-level', so that it can vary across children within the same naíonra, or at 'naíonra-level' so that it is the same for all children in the group. All child-level variables are entered before naíonra-level variables. This procedure can be seen as attempting to explain differences in children's results first on the basis of 'child-level' characteristics, and only then to look for 'naíonra-level' effects - which will tend, if anything, to err on the conservative side in apportioning explanatory power to 'naíonra-level' variables.

At child-level, age, sex and general cognitive ability have a clear claim to logical priority before the other variables. In terms of linguistic input, parental ability in Irish can be seen as something essentially determined before the arrival of the child. The numbers of siblings attending all-Irish schools and naíonraí can also be seen as logically preceding the linguistic input to the child under consideration. The language mainly spoken to the child as a baby and toddler enters next: the baseline is that only English was spoken, and separate dummy variables measure the impact of speaking mainly Irish, or a mixture of Irish and English. *Current* use of Irish in the home is a consideration which arises later in time, and correspondingly enters later into the regression. The final 'child-level' variable simply measures whether the child is in his or her first or second year in the naíonra.

Naíonra level variables are then entered. The first of these is whether the naíonra is located in a Gaeltacht or Galltacht area - a distinction which can be expected to pick up not only effects which arise within the naíonra, but also the effects of the child's broader linguistic community. A measure of the Irish ability of the Stiúrthóir is entered next, as this is logically a key determinant of the linguistic environment provided by the naíonra. In some preliminary estimation a three-way classification was used, but since coefficients for Stiúrthóirí with 'good' Irish did not differ significantly from those who were native speakers or had native-speaker competence, these categories were merged, and contrasted with those whose Irish was classified as 'weak' or 'satisfactory'.

Finally, three other naíonra characteristics suggested by previous research, and the findings of Section 7.2, are entered. The first of these simply indicates whether the naíonra is located in a school (ordinary or all-Irish/Gaeltacht). The second is the number of children in the naíonra session; and the third is the pupil-teacher ratio in the session, which takes into account the presence or absence of a Stiúrthóir Cúnta. (Permutations of the order of entry of the last three variables, for which logical considerations are less clear-cut, make no major difference to the conclusions drawn here: the particular order of entry reflects the relative strength of the first-order correlations between these 3 independent variables and the dependent variable).

Table 7.10 Hierarchical regression of a measure of children's Irish production on child, background, family, naíonra and Stiúrthóir variables

Predictor Variables	Multiple R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	R^2 Change	F Change	Degrees of freedom	Signif. level for F change	Beta
Age	.219	.048	.043	.048	8.92	2,187	.003	.039
Sex	.227	.052	.041	.004	0.69	3,186	.409	-.044
General Cognitive Ability	.369	.136	.122	.085	17.20	4,185	.000	.407**
Parents' Irish ability	.510	.260	.243	.123	29.00	5,184	.000	.084
Number of siblings in all-Irish education	.539	.291	.270	.031	7.50	6,183	.007	.072
Home lang. Irish (Irish to child as baby & toddler)	.628	.394	.373	.104	29.40	7,182	.000	.250**
Home lang. Irish/English (Ir. & Eng. as baby/ toddler)	.646	.417	.393	.023	6.67	8,181	.011	.057
Current Irish use in home	.661	.438	.411	.021	6.20	9,180	.014	.116*
Period in naíonra	.662	.438	.408	.000	0.08	10,179	.784	.027
Gaeltacht dweller	.684	.468	.437	.030	9.60	11,178	.002	.092
Stiúrthóir's Irish ability	.724	.524	.493	.056	19.80	12,177	.000	.120*
Naíonra located in school	.788	.621	.593	.096	42.10	13,176	.000	-.290**
Number of children in naíonra session	.795	.632	.604	.012	5.32	14,175	.022	-.159**
Pupil-teacher ratio	.795	.633	.601	.000	.08	15,174	.775	.018

*= $p<.05$ or below **= $p<.01$ or below

7.4.2 Discussion of Hierarchical Regression Results

In total, the set of 14 variables included in the hierarchical regression can account for 63% of the variance in the test score, a very high proportion indeed. Child-level variables account for almost seven-tenths of the explained variance, with naíonra-level variables contributing the other three-tenths. Of course, this analysis measures the effect of variation *between naíonraí* on children's Irish test scores, not the *total* impact of naíonra attendance on Irish performance. This broader task would require information on a control group of children from different language backgrounds who did not attend naíonraí, which could not be obtained within the framework of the present study. Each variable, other than sex, the length of time spent in the naíonra and the pupil-teacher ratio, can be seen as contributing a significant addition to the explained variance, within the logic of the hierarchical regression approach. Particularly large additions are made by the measure of general cognitive ability (just over 8 percentage points, or about 13% of the total explained variance); by the variable indicating that Irish was used as the main language to the child as a baby and toddler (just over 10 percentage points, or about 16% of the total explained variance); and by parental speaking ability in the Irish language (just over 12 percentage points, or almost 20% of the total explained variance). At naíonra-level, the largest contributions are made by the measure of Stiúrthóir's Irish competence (about 9% of the explained variance) and the indicator for naíonraí located in schools (about 15% of the explained variance). In terms of the logic of the hierarchical regression, these 5 variables can be seen as accounting for almost three-quarters of the explained variance.

The beta coefficient estimates from the final hierarchical regression are given in the last column of Table 7.10. It can be seen that while 11 variables are judged by the hierarchical method as providing a significant contribution towards the explained variance, only 6 are judged as having coefficients significantly different from zero at the 5% level. This contrast arises because of the complex links between the explanatory variables. For example, age is entered first, as logic demands; and makes a clear contribution towards the explanation of test scores. But the effect of age on test scores operates mainly through its impact on the child's cognitive ability. Thus, when a direct measure of cognitive ability is included in the equation, the coefficient on age is no longer significantly different from zero.

7.4.3 Simultaneous Regression Estimates

While the inclusion of regressors (such as age) which have coefficients close to zero does not bias the estimates of other coefficients, it does tend to reduce the precision of the estimates. For this reason, it is of interest to examine a more parsimonious set of regressors, which may be expected to explain a similar proportion of the variance, and for which more precise estimates will be possible. This was done by a systematic backward elimination from the final hierarchical regression equation, eliminating the 'least significant' variables, provided that they were not significantly different from zero at the 10% level. The results of this procedure are reported in Table 7.11, which, for comprehensiveness, also includes the results of a full and parsimonious regression for Galltacht children only (the sample size is insufficient to allow for similar estimates for Gaeltacht children only). The final results of the full hierarchical regression for the full sample are repeated (rounded to 2 decimal places) in column (1), allowing a comparison with the results for the parsimonious specification in column (2). The first point to note is that the parsimonious specification does indeed explain a similar proportion of the variance in test scores - 62% or more (see R^2 at bottom of table in column (4)). In general, the beta coefficients in the parsimonious specification are not very different from those in the more general specification. But a combination of some differences in the coefficient estimates for parental Irish ability and Gaeltacht location, coupled with the greater degree of precision of the estimates, means that the coefficients for 7 variables are found to be significantly different from zero (rather than 5 when the full set of regressors is included).

The relative size of the beta coefficients gives an alternative perspective on the relative impact of the different variables on production test scores. The beta coefficients show the

Table 7.11: Alternative regression estimates: full sample and Galltacht only

Sample	*All*	*All*	*Galltacht*	*Galltacht*
Specification	*Full Beta Coeff.*	*Parsimonious Beta Coeff.*	*Full Beta Coeff.*	*Parsimonious Beta Coeff.*
N	*N=178*	*N=178*	*N=124*	*N=124*
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age	0.04		0.03	
Sex	-0.04		-0.07	
General Cognitive Ability	0.41**	0.42**	0.45**	0.48**
Parents' Irish ability	0.08	0.12*	0.08	0.11
Number of siblings in all-Irish education	0.07		0.11	0.11
Home language: Irish	0.25**	0.23**	0.14*	0.12*
Home language: Irish and English	0.06		0.07	
Current Irish use in home	0.12*	0.11	0.06	
Period in naíonra	0.03		0.04	
Gaeltacht dweller (1=yes)	0.09	0.15*	n.a.	n.a.
Stiúrthóir's Irish ability	0.12*	0.12*	0.19**	0.21**
Naíonra located in school	-0.29**	-0.17**	-0.12	
Number children in session	-0.16*	-0.13*	-0.37**	-0.44**
Pupil-teacher ratio	0.02		-0.02	
R^2	0.63	0.62	0.64	0.62
Adjusted R^2	0.60	0.61	0.60	0.60

change that can be expected in the dependent variable for an increase in the independent variable of one standard deviation. This goes some way towards indicating the relative impact of each variable, though it should be noted that dichotomous variables (such as home language Irish) *cannot* in fact increase by one standard deviation: they can only take on the value 0 (for those who were not raised through Irish) or 1 (for those who were).

Looking at the results of the parsimonious specification for the full sample (Column 2), it can be seen that the largest beta coefficient is associated with general cognitive ability - its value of 0.42 is almost twice that of the next highest coefficient. This suggests that the impact of an increase in this variable is particularly strong. The next highest beta coefficient is the value of 0.23 on the variable indicating Irish was the main home language spoken to the child as a baby and toddler. Other beta coefficients are between 0.11 and 0.17.

The sample size is not sufficient to allow a formal test of whether or not the estimated relationship holds equally for Gaeltacht and Galltacht areas. However, it is possible to estimate the relationship separately for the Galltacht naíonraí, and compare the coefficients with those for the overall relationship. This can give some informal indication of the extent to which Gaeltacht/Galltacht differences may be influencing the overall estimates. For example, one may wish to know whether the estimated coefficient on the number of children in a session is being influenced by the smaller session sizes observed in Gaeltacht areas (where, for other reasons, higher test scores are also observed).

Broadly speaking, the results for Galltacht areas are similar to those for the full sample. Again, over 60% of the variance in production test scores can be explained either by the full set of regressors, or by the more parsimonious specification. The pattern of beta coefficients found in the Galltacht area regressions is similar to that in the corresponding overall regressions. The main differences between the Galltacht and the overall results are a somewhat greater role for the variable measuring the Irish ability of Stiúrthóirí in the Galltacht sample; a less negative impact of school location (not significantly different from zero in the Galltacht); and a *stronger* (i.e., more negative) impact from class size. The latter change is the most striking one. It clearly indicates that the negative coefficient on class size in the overall regression is *not* simply due to the coincidence that class sizes tend to be smaller in Gaeltacht areas: the effect of class size on production test scores is found to be even greater when attention is focused solely on the Galltacht naíonraí.

7.4.4 Multi-level Modelling

Methods for dealing with data sets combining information from different levels or units of analysis have developed rapidly in recent years. Developments have been particularly rapid in the area of educational research, where identification of effects at child, class and school level can be of particular interest. Regression analyses undertaken at child-level, but including 'class-' or 'school-level' variables, may be likely to overestimate the significance of school level effects. In order to examine the sensitivity of the regression results reported above to such considerations, a multi-level analysis of the data was undertaken, using the ML3E package developed by Goldstein *et al.* For a full discussion of multi-level modelling see Goldstein (1995) and Bryk and Raudenbusch (1988).

The model which is estimated is based on the parsimonious regression specification for the full sample. Multilevel models begin by establishing the extent of variation in the dependent variable at each level of analysis. This is done in column (1) of Table 7.12 below, which shows that just over half of the variation in production test scores was at naíonra-level, with the remainder being at child-level.

Table 7.12:Multi-level model results: Full sample

	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*
Specification	*Null*	*Child level variables*	*Child and naíonra-level variables*
	(1)	*(2)*	*(3)*
Fixed effects			
Intercept	0.820*	0.244*	0.289*
General Cognitive Ability		0.616*	0.625*
Parents' Irish ability		0.028*	0.025*
Home language: Irish		0.319*	0.293*
Current Irish use		0.020	0.021
Gaeltacht residence			0.108*
Stiúrthóir's Irish ability			0.063
Naíonra in school			-0.201*
N children in session			-0.003
Random effects			
Variance at naíonra-level	0.04068	0.02616	0.0079
Variance at child-level	0.03451	0.02035	0.02045
% Variance explained			
Naíonra-level		35.7	80.6
Child-level		41.0	40.7
% of remaining variance at:			
Naíonra-level	54.1	56.2	27.9
Child-level	45.9	43.8	72.1

Column (2) shows that child-level variables explain over one-third of the variance in average test scores across naíonraí, as well as explaining over 40% of the variance between children within naíonraí. Thus, a substantial part of the difference between average scores for naíonraí reflects differences in the characteristics of the children, such as their home language or general cognitive ability. Column (3) shows that naíonra-level variables bring the proportion of inter-naíonra variance accounted for up to 80%. This high degree of explanation of the inter-naíonra variance is achieved with only four child-level and four naíonra-level variables. The coefficient estimates in the final multi-level model in column 3) are in fact very similar to those produced by the regression methods.[1] The multi-level estimates take account of the lower degrees of freedom relevant to naíonra-level effects (there being only 25 naíonra, as against about 180 children in most of the regression results). This results in higher standard errors, and accounts for the fact that two of the naíonra-level variables have multi-level coefficients which are not significantly different from zero. These results indicate the difficulty of identifying naíonra-level effects with the current data set. The regression estimates should therefore be treated with some caution; but the lack of significance of some naíonra-level coefficients in the multi-level estimates should not be interpreted as establishing firmly that the corresponding effects do not exist. A more realistic interpretation would be that they cannot be identified with a high degree of statistical precision using the current data set, which has only 25 naíonraí. In the next section, therefore, we discuss the key variables identified by the regression estimates, in the light of other research findings from the literature.

7.5 DISCUSSION

The regression analyses reported in Section 7.4 suggest that the following variables play a key role in influencing children's Irish achievement, as measured by the scores on the production test:

General cognitive ability
Parents' Irish ability
Irish spoken to the child as a baby and toddler
Current frequency of Irish use at home
Gaeltacht location
Stiúrthóir's Irish ability
Naíonra located in a school
Number of children in the naíonra session (class size)

Thus, all other things being equal, a child's production score could be expected to be higher if he or she had an above average score in the general cognitive ability test; had at least one parent with moderate or high ability in Irish; had had Irish spoken to him or her as a baby and toddler; had at least some Irish spoken in the home currently; lived in the Gaeltacht; had a Stiúrthóir with a good to fluent knowledge of Irish; attended a naíonra which was not located in a school; and attended a relatively small naíonra. Each of these factors is now discussed in turn.

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[1] The simple regression coefficients on which this statement are based are *not* those reported in Table 7.11 earlier: the figures in Table 7.11 are *beta* coefficients, which are not directly comparable with the estimates produced by the multi-level methods.

7.5.1 General Cognitive Ability

General cognitive ability was found to be a highly significant predictor of children's production scores in Irish, accounting for over 13% of the total explained variance in the hierarchical regression. There is an enduring controversy about the relationship between general intelligence, language proficiency and language aptitude. Gardner (1985) has claimed that language aptitude is unrelated to intelligence. Carroll (1983), while accepting that intelligence and language proficiency are closely connected, argued against their equivalence. On the other hand, other theorists (e.g. Pimsleur and Quinn 1971; Oller and Perkins 1978) claimed that intelligence and language proficiency are virtually equivalent, and that intelligence is an important component of language aptitude (which also includes variables such as motivation). Oller (1979) claimed that the equivalence of general intelligence and language proficiency holds for both first and second language proficiency. Boyle (1987) argued against the theory that intelligence and language proficiency are indistinguishable, but he concluded that they are connected. Skehan (1990) found significant correlations between scores on a verbal intelligence test and a test of foreign language proficiency and postulated that, while basic interpersonal communication skills (Cummins 1983) may not be strongly related to general intelligence, cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP in Cummins's terms) is. Genesee (1976) found a strong link between intelligence and the development of academic L2 skills such as grammar, vocabulary and reading, but not oral productive skills. Harris and Murtagh (1991) found that general verbal intelligence was a significant predictor of Irish achievement among their sample of sixth grade pupils.

Cummins (1984) addressed the issue of whether some children might be more likely to experience learning difficulties in immersion than they would if attending a non-immersion school. Since general intelligence is predictive of success in any school programme, the critical question is whether lower ability students do worse in immersion than in ordinary schools. Citing Genessee (1976) and Bruck (1982), he argued that IQ measures and L1 cognitive/academic ability are strongly related to pupils' academic performance in immersion and regular schools, but do not have a differential effect across school type. He claimed that low academic ability pupils did no worse in immersion than in non-immersion schools. He concluded that:

> ..immersion programmes, properly understood and implemented, appear to represent an appropriate form of enrichment bilingual education for all students, majority and minority, learning 'disabled' and non-disabled. Such programmes result in additive bilingualism at no apparent cost to children's personal or academic development.
>
> Cummins 1984:177.

Cummins also argued that, while IQ scores predict academic performance in French and English in Canadian immersion schools, they have weaker links with French conversational skills. Thus, even lower ability pupils can acquire good levels of conversational fluency in their L2, just as they can in their L1. Similarly, Swain and Lapkin (1982), in longitudinal research on larger immersion populations also found that low IQ students were not ultimately at a disadvantage in French immersion in terms of their language outcome.

In the present study it should be noted that even children who were classified as having 'low' general cognitive ability test scores made substantial gains in Irish comprehension (average scores of about 53% compared to about 73% for high ability children), indicating that their rate of L2 learning is slower, but not that their overall ability to learn the language is inadequate, since for both high and lower ability pupils this would also be influenced by other factors such as motivation, exposure to the language, parental ability and current use in the home. It is also worth noting that, since general cognitive ability rises with age, then Stiúrthóirí will see it mediated through age (older children having higher ability), even though the variable age itself did not prove to be significant in the multivariate analyses.

7.5.2 Parents' Irish Ability

Parents' Irish ability accounted for almost 20% of the total explained variance in the children's production scores in the hierarchical regression. This variable accounted for a larger proportion of the explained variance than any other child-level variable. The multilevel model results indicated that parents' Irish ability remained a significant factor in the overall production scores.

Parents' Irish ability was found in Table 7.11 to be significantly correlated with home language Irish and home language Irish/English, current use of Irish in the home, number of siblings in Irish-medium education, and residence in the Gaeltacht. However, it is important to remember that the effect of parents' Irish ability shown by the multivariate statistics is not simply due to this correlation with other variables, such as living in the Gaeltacht, since in the multivariate analysis other variables are controlled for in assessing the impact of an individual variable. Thus, while we expect that parents' Irish ability is linked to residence in the Gaeltacht and to speaking Irish to their child in the home, nevertheless, it remains significant even when those variables are controlled for by the statistical analysis.

It is true, of course, that higher parental ability in Irish is also associated with higher educational qualifications and higher occupational status. Research by Ó Riagáin (1997) has indicated the link between Irish ability, educational attainment and occupational status. Similar links are to be found among parents of naíonra children. This raises the issue of whether the positive influence found for parental Irish ability may reflect a socio-economic advantage for these children. Some additional analysis was undertaken to investigate this issue. A variable measuring the highest educational qualification attained by either parent was constructed; two variables based on this, one indicating Leaving Certificate qualifications and another qualification beyond Leaving Certificate, were included in a hierarchical regression analysis. These additional variables were entered as the first of the home-level variables, in advance of parental Irish ability, in order to allow maximum scope for their impact. The results indicated that these additional variables made no significant contribution to the explanation of production test scores, while parental ability in Irish remained significant. Thus, it seems that the link between parental Irish ability and children's production test scores is a genuine one, rather than a proxy for socio-economic advantages.

The role of parents in immersion education has not received a great deal of attention in international research, which tends to focus more on class- and school-programme-level variables than on home and community ones. However, it is worth remembering that in Canada, as in Ireland, immersion schools were, and are, most often founded at the suggestion and insistence of parents, rather than educators. Parents in Canada in 1977 formed an organisation called 'Canadian Parents for French' (CPF) with the aim of supporting and improving French second-language learning opportunities. This acts both as a pressure group and as an informational resource for parents considering immersion. Similarly, the initiative to form naíonraí and all-Irish schools is generally parent-led also. Some information of the type supplied by CPF (in a booklet reviewing research for parents considering early immersion, and another for already-involved parents, entitled *How to be an Immersion Parent)* is made available to Irish parents by Na Naíonraí Gaelacha in the booklet *An Tuismitheoir agus an Naíonra* (Na Naíonraí Gaelacha 1994). The Welsh immersion movement also seeks to involve parents in Welsh activities and classes, and provides them with guidance in leaflets and booklets.

Gibson (1984), in discussing the role of parents in immersion, noted that having children in immersion has motivated many parents to try to improve their competence in the target language in order to be able to participate more or help children with homework. The link between parental ability and Irish production scores points to the value of offering Irish classes to parents. However, it is worth noting that such classes might be of greater benefit, and have higher take-up among parents, if they were more focused on the language being learned and used by their children in immersion, rather than using the format of Irish classes offered to the general public. In this regard the ITÉ booklet *BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí* (Basic Irish for Parents) is suitable in that it is directed at the kind of vocabulary and phrases used in the naíonraí, and could form the basis of a course specifically for parents. In addition, it is important to encourage parents to use their growing ability in Irish at every opportunity with their children, and practical suggestions about how to increase Irish use in the home would be most likely to have the desired effect. This issue is discussed further in Chapter 8.

7.5.3 Home Language Irish and Home Language Irish and English

The variable 'only Irish spoken to child as baby and toddler', accounts for 16% of the total explained variance in the hierarchical regression. It is to be expected that this variable, which pinpoints the native Irish speakers among the test children, should account for a large proportion of the explained variance in production scores. Children whose home language was Irish did significantly better on both comprehension and production than children from bilingual or English-only homes, indicating that the test did pinpoint language skills, rather than more global test-taking skills.

However, Table 7.10 showed that in the hierarchical regression the variable 'Irish and English spoken to child as baby and toddler' (otherwise described as 'home language Irish and English') did provide a significant contribution towards the explained variance, accounting for about 4% of that variance. Figure 7.3 illustrated the effect of the home language variable in isolation, and showed the faster progress made in production by children from bilingual homes than those from English-only homes.

Overall then, home language made a significant difference in Irish production scores, with children from Irish-only homes scoring significantly higher than children from other home language backgrounds, while children from bilingual homes scored significantly higher than those from English-only homes. The children from English-only backgrounds reached quite a high level of Irish comprehension within a year in the naíonra, and their score on the comprehension test did not differ significantly from the children with mixed English-Irish at home. Nevertheless, their progress on production was not as swift. Children who heard some Irish at home did significantly better on the production test than children with only English as home language. Having at least some exposure to Irish at home may give children time to become comfortable with using the Irish they know, and enable them to move from the 'silent phase' of language learning to the stage of attempting to communicate with whatever words or phrases they have at their disposal.

7.5.4 Current Irish Use in Home

This variable was based on parents' reports of how much Irish they used with their children 'now', that is, after the child had spent a period in the naíonra (at least 2 terms by the time of data collection from parents). Parents noted whether they spoke Irish 'always' 'regularly', 'sometimes' or 'never'. While parents who had 'always' spoken Irish to their child prior to the naíonra showed no change, there were significant increases in use among other parents (see Table 4.5) in their level of Irish use 'sometimes' and 'regularly', and a decrease in those who 'never' spoke Irish to their children. The effect of this usage was found to contribute significantly to the explained variance in the hierarchical regression ($p<.014$) although this variable was dropped from the parsimonious specification for the simultaneous regression, and was not found to be significant in the multi-level model. Given that the regression results control for home language and parental ability, it is not surprising that there should be some difficulty in identifying an independent effect of current Irish use on children's production test scores. But taking all these together, the results point to the role of continuing home support for the language learned, and the importance of encouraging parents to use the Irish available to them as often as possible

7.5.5 Gaeltacht

Gaeltacht residence was found to exert a significant influence on children's production scores by the simultaneous regression model as well as the multi-level model. This effect must be interpreted separately from home language, which was examined in the variables already discussed, and therefore points to the influence of community use of Irish on children's production. It therefore disagrees with Egan's (1981:51) finding of 'an overall negative correlation between the Gaeltacht....and the achievement of the children in Irish'. Hindley (1990) quotes Ó Conchúir's citation of this result, and claims that:

> A chapter could be written on the implications of this quotation, from conflicting viewpoints, but no interpretation of it can be held to augur well for native Irish, whatever else one chooses to make of the position where the children of urban learners now speak 'better' Irish than those from a rural native Irish background - or are regarded as doing so.
>
> Hindley (1990:213)

Hindley cited this result in support of his claim that the Irish language is in terminal difficulties in the Gaeltacht, but in this case the claim is based on an inadequately supported conclusion. Egan's conclusion was presented tentatively, since she was aware of the pilot nature of her study, which depended on a small sample and bivariate analyses which could not control for the effect of home language.

Instead, the present study shows that children attending naíonraí in the Gaeltacht had significantly higher production scores in Irish than those in the Galltacht, when other variables such as general cognitive ability, home language, parental Irish ability *etc.* were controlled for. This points to a clear and significant community language effect which operates independently of the other variables already discussed. While Hindley's overall conclusion of a decline in the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht may be supported by other sources, it is not supported here by any observed inferiority of Irish production scores among Gaeltacht naíonra attenders. On the contrary, Gaeltacht children consistently out-performed Galltacht children on the measure of Irish production.

7.5.6 Irish Competence of Stiúrthóirí[1]

The hierarchical regression showed that the Irish ability of Stiúrthóirí accounted for about 9% of the total explained variance. The parsimonious simultaneous regression showed that the Stiúrthóir's Irish competence exerted an even stronger effect in Galltacht naíonraí. This significant effect points to the centrality of the Stiúrthóir as the main source of Irish input. The regression showed that Stiúrthóirí who were native speakers, or who had native-speaker-like or good competence in Irish had in their naíonra children with significantly higher production scores than those whose Irish was weak or only satisfactory. Overall, 18% of Stiúrthóirí fall into these lower categories of Irish competence (and as many as 43% of Stiúrthóirí Cúnta). These results clearly point to the benefit to be gained by attempting to raise the standard of these Stiúrthóirí at least to the intermediate level.

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[1] The Irish competence of each Stiúrthóir was rated by her Comhairleoir, who was a regular visitor, on a five-point scale from 'lag/ag dul i bhfeabhas', 'sásúil', 'maith', 'cumas cainteoir dúchais' and 'cainteoir dúchais'. Stiúrthóirí also rated their own competence on the same scale in their questionnaire, and in fact there were very few differences between the self-assessment and the Comhairleoir assessment. However, it was decided to use the Comhairleoir rating for this variable, for greater objectivity.

The issue of teachers' language competence is not one which has attracted much research within the immersion literature, although there is an extensive literature on the role of teachers as sole input in the target language. There is, however, occasional comment on teachers' fluency in relation to the shortage of immersion teachers. Lapkin, Swain and Shapson (1990) placed investigation of the role of the immersion teacher at the top of the French immersion research agenda for the nineties. Majhanovich and Gray (1992) focused on the importance of the practicum in immersion teacher education for primary level. They identified student teachers' language fluency as a major concern in their study, even after an initial screening to ensure that all participants 'had a sufficient knowledge of French to cope in a French immersion environment' (p.685). Brine and Shapson (1989) outlined a re-training course aimed at practising teachers wishing to move into immersion, and a major component of this was a period of 6 weeks spent in an entirely Francophone environment, with additional French tuition throughout a full academic year. In the case of the naíonraí, consideration could be given to adding a similar course in advanced Irish to the basic training for Stiúrthóirí who are not native speakers, if possible in the Gaeltacht.

The lack of a distinction between native-speakers or near-natives and those with a 'good' level of competence suggests that, for the children's production scores at least, native-like competence is not essential (although highly desirable) but that a good level of Irish competence is. This is probably linked to the fact that the majority of children in the naíonraí are at the very earliest stages of learning Irish, requiring large amounts of input which is comprehensible, contextualised, appropriate and accurate. Such learners need a fluent Stiúrthóir who is sufficiently confident in her Irish to speak it confidently and freely to them, rather than hesitantly or reluctantly. Thus, it would be beneficial if this intermediate level of Irish competence were considered the required minimum competence level for those setting up naíonraí, and if already practising Stiúrthóirí were given every encouragement to improve their standard at least to this level, and preferably beyond it.

The Irish ability of the naíonra assistants also requires greater consideration in order to improve the profile of competence among this group. While it may be difficult to find assistants in a particular locality who meet the other criteria for pre-school education and have a good standard of Irish, it is clear that the role of Stiúrthóirí and their assistants as the main providers of Irish input to a large proportion of children requires that Irish competence be given a high priority in selecting naíonra personnel. Potential Stiúrthóirí or assistants who do not have sufficient fluency in the language should be helped to improve their Irish competence in their training course before beginning operation. Given the centrality of the Stiúrthóir's fluency in fulfilling the objectives of the naíonra, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta may need to consider postponing official recognition of those Stiúrthóirí whose Irish does not meet this minimum standard.

7.5.7 Location

The multivariate analyses indicated that location exerts a significant influence on children's progress in the naíonra, since children attending a naíonra in a school (either an ordinary or an all-Irish school) scored lower on average on the production test than those attending a home or hall-based naíonra. School location emerged as a negative influence on children's production scores in the hierarchical regression, the simultaneous regression on the full specification and in the multi-level model (in which analyses other variables such as class size were controlled for). These results raise interesting questions about the nature of the association between location in a school, naíonra efficacy and children's test results. It may be that locating a naíonra in a school influences the nature of the activity in the naíonra, for example, for practical reasons such as noise reduction or administrative convenience, or that young children are less comfortable in the formal atmosphere of a school. The data set gathered here is not well suited to further analysis of these questions, but points to their possible importance.

Some relevant evidence on the general effects of location in a school for pre-school efficacy is provided by Osborn and Milbank's (1987) study. They also noted that school-based play-groups were among the least effective pre-school locations in their sample. In their study of a range of pre-school provision in Britain they found that the relative advantage of home-based play-groups was related to their small size, and that conversely, the poorer performance of children from pre-schools in schools was linked to their larger size. However, in this study of the naíonraí, the significant negative effect of school location holds even when class size is controlled for in the multivariate analyses.

Osborn and Milbank found that children in local authority nursery classes, located in primary schools which cater for children aged 5 and over, performed about on a par with children who did not attend any form of pre-school, and in the follow-up study were indistinguishable. However, children who attended Local Education Authority nursery schools, which are in self-contained nursery premises (catering only for very young children) and staffed by teachers with nursery or primary school qualifications, had enhanced performance compared to children in nursery classes (located in primary schools) and non-attenders. They postulated that pre-school education within a primary school resembles infant reception classes in some respects, and cite as evidence for this the finding that child-adult ratios of more than 10:1 occurred in over a third of these groups based within primary schools, compared with only 3% in specialist nursery schools. They concluded:

> We suggest on the basis of these results that some children in our sample were attending nursery classes that were run more on the line of an infant reception class than a class in a nursery school.
>
> Osborn and Milbank (1987:219)

It may also be the case that a school classroom, with its functional furniture and larger space, may be intimidating to young children, and the added hustle and bustle of a number of older pupils' comings and goings may also be unsettling or threatening to pre-schoolers. It is possible that the location effect also arises from an interaction with teaching style. School location may influence teaching style simply by association, with a tendency to emulate the more formal style of older classes within the naíonra, and a desire to reduce noise levels or freedom of movement in order not to impinge on the learning environment of the older pupils. On the other hand, it is possible that the school classroom and materials may allow more activities and options for individual play, with a consequent decrease in the amount of Irish input available to all children at all times. This effect has been discussed in Chapter 5 under the heading of 'daily activities'.

Sylva *et al.* (1980:130) noted the evidence that the nature of an institution has a direct impact on the behaviour of the children inside it, with children's behaviour mirroring the organisation of the pre-school centre. They noted that, in their study, home-based play-groups operated like extensions of the home, while nursery classes in primary schools operated more like 'proper' school classes. Overall, they observed that children in the pre-schools they studied spent only about 5% of their time in dialogue with an adult, and only about 15% of their time in conversation with another child. They argue that this scarcity of dialogue is not due to poor conversational skills at this age, but due to limitations imposed by the setting and size of the group:

> The typical pre-school does not nurture dialogue, whereas other (see the work of Garvey, 1977) out-of-home settings *do*. Such 'dialogue inducing' settings are small, quiet rooms, with two or three children in them, and furnished like a home rather than a school.
>
> Sylva, Roy and Painter (1980:82)

Thus, they argue that type of setting as well as number of children in the group affects the frequency and richness of the language used by children in the pre-school. This is of great relevance to the naíonraí, since a central aim is the fostering of L2 skills. Further qualitative work is now being undertaken (Hickey, in preparation) to evaluate the frequency and type of language used in a sub-sample of naíonraí.

Osborn and Milbank also claimed that nursery teachers in primary schools are frequently accorded lower status than teachers of infant children and may be less well resourced, with consequent lower morale for these teachers than nursery teachers who operate independently or in nursery schools. However, it is unlikely that school-based naíonraí would have significantly inferior resourcing than non-school-based ones. Nevertheless, it may be that comparison with the position and resourcing of primary schools and teachers has a negative effect on the morale of Stiúrthóirí who are based in schools, but have to operate independently of them. On the other hand, it might have been expected that school location would counteract the isolation experienced by many Stiúrthóirí (discussed in Chapter 5). However, if this is the case, it does not appear to translate into higher scores for the children attending these naíonraí.

It must be remembered that the effect of location noted here was based on a small sample of naíonraí (N=25, school-based naíonraí N=10) in which 225 children were tested. Therefore, the conclusions for location effects must remain tentative. However, the fact that this finding supports Egan's earlier result of lower Irish scores from children in school-based naíonraí, and is also supported by Osborn and Milbank's larger study and observations by Sylva *et al.* (1980) provides some external corroboration. There is a clear need to further monitor the effect of location in a school on children's success in the naíonraí in future research. In the meantime, it is recommended that naíonraí located in schools attempt to make their setting and interaction-styles as home-like or intimate as possible, and resist the influence of the surrounding school environment. Sylva *et al.* (1980) noted that it is possible for larger pre-school centres to create an atmosphere of intimacy, but 'this feat requires careful planning of programme and arranging of space' (p. 165). On the basis of the present study, it is also suggested that the possible advantage for Irish acquisition afforded by a home- or hall-based location be borne in mind in promoting the setting up of new naíonraí. This may require some monitoring and re-evaluation of a recent policy change by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta to encourage new naíonraí to choose public venues (such as schools and halls) rather than private homes. This policy aims to highlight the role of the naíonra in the community and help maintain its continuity, but discouraging home-based naíonraí would appear, on the basis of these results, to lead to a regrettable decline in one of the most appropriate settings for young children's learning, and a possible increase in what may, on the face of this evidence, be a less appropriate setting for naíonraí. It is recognised that the implementation of the Child Care Act may make the establishment of naíonraí in private homes and other venues which are not purpose-built somewhat more difficult, given the need to satisfy regulations regarding fire and safety, for example. However, these results point in general to the value of locating naíonraí in non-school environments where possible, and if naíonraí are located in schools, to the need to operate them in as informal or home-like a fashion as possible.

7.5.8 Class Size and Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The regression results suggested that overall class size exerted a significant effect on children's production scores, while the pupil-teacher ratio did not. The negative effect of class size was found to be greatest in the Galltacht, where most large naíonraí are clustered. The multi-level results suggest that the overall result must be treated with some caution, though it seems likely that *at least within the Galltacht*, larger naíonraí tend to depress children's Irish production scores. The Census results (Table 2.2) showed that over a third of naíonraí (36.3%) had 16 or more children. In the light of the findings on the effects of class size, it would appear to be worthwhile to reduce the number of large naíonraí where possible, and to aim to keep naíonraí below a maximum of 15 children.

There have been many reasons suggested for the negative effect of class size operating independently of pupil-teacher ratio. Howes, Phillips and Whitebrook (1990), in a large study of children in a range of day-care situations, found that group size was negatively associated with developmentally appropriate activities; they found that children in groups larger than 18 experienced lower levels of appropriate care-giving and developmentally appropriate activities than children in smaller groups. Only 46% of their sample in groups larger than 18 were rated as receiving 'good' or 'very good' care-giving and only 16% were judged to engage in 'good' or 'very good' developmentally appropriate activities. Conversely, these figures for children in groups smaller than 18 were 73% for care-giving and 74% for appropriate activities. This significant link between smaller groups and the provision of developmentally appropriate activities was explained by the authors as evidence of the ability of teachers of smaller groups to individualise care, allow children to move around more freely, and maintain an orderliness which allows children not to be interrupted as they engaged in activities. Sylva *et al.* (1980) also noted that children in smaller groups engaged in more challenging activities and had more social interaction than those in larger groups. They observed that the intimacy which fosters social interaction and challenging activities is easier to achieve with fewer children on the roll.

While it is clearly a worthwhile objective to keep naíonra size and ratios small, it is worth noting, to emphasise the value of pre-schooling in general, that many of the 56% (Dept. of Education Statistics 1992-1993:3) of all four-year-olds who start school at the optional age of 4 years are in classes of more than 30 children to one adult, and the ratio in Junior Infants in some ordinary and all-Irish schools is the maximum of 35:1. Educational statistics for the year 1992-1993 show that 49% of children in Junior Infants and 54% of children in Senior Infants in that year were in classes of 30 or more. Perhaps even more relevant to the comparison with pre-schools in general is the fact that only 6% of Junior Infants classes in this period had fewer than 19 children, and only 5% of Senior Infants. (For some discussion of the lack of continuity of provision between pre-schools and schools in Ireland see Ó Murchú 1984-5; Gilligan 1991; and Hayes 1992). This issue will be considered in the concluding chapter.

Blatchford and Mortimore (1994) list a number of processes which they believe may explain the link between smaller classes for young children and better educational outcome. Among those they list, which appear to be relevant to the naíonraí, are:

1. Individualisation. (Galton *et al.* 1980, Shapson *et al.* 1980, Pate-Bain *et al.* 1992)
2. Better quality of teaching. Just as Howes *et al.* (1990) found that smaller classes were associated with better provision of developmentally appropriate activities, so too did Glass *et al.* (1982) find that smaller classes were associated with better use of teaching materials, classroom organisation, variety and imagination in activities and pupil assessment.

3. Better management of behaviour. (Campbell and Neill 1992)
4. Better pupil and teacher morale. Robinson and Wittebols (1986) found that pupils in smaller classes had more positive attitudes, especially in kindergarten to grade 3 classes. Turner (1990) claimed that pupils' self-esteem can be enhanced more effectively in smaller classes than in larger ones. Glass and Smith (1979) found that teacher morale was higher in smaller classes.
5. Improved pupil-pupil relations. Smaller classes are linked to less aggression and more co-operation between pupils (Bain and Achilles 1986).
6. More time and space for the planning and organisation of activities (Clarke 1981).

Most of the research on class size comments on or manipulates pupil-teacher ratios also. In discussing such ratios, Lewis (1993) argues that the ratio of pupils to teachers should ideally be no larger than 10 to 1. Indeed, Howes *et al.* (1990) noted that in their study 'the California standard of 8:1 for pre-schoolers was associated with higher levels of appropriate care-giving than the FIDCR 9:1 standard' (p.23). They argue, therefore, that decreasing PTR even by one child can make a difference to the quality of child-care provided. They found that only 42% of their sampled children in groups with PTRs of more than 8:1 received care-giving rated as 'good' or 'very good', while only 12% of such children were engaged in 'good' (and none received 'very good') developmentally appropriate activities. Sylva *et al.* (1980) also found that their results supported the principle of 'the more adults, the better'.

However, PTR was found not to be a significant variable in the hierarchical regression in this study and it was therefore excluded from the parsimonious specification of the simultaneous regression and the multi-level model. The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that manipulating PTR is not sufficient to provide children in large groups with similar access to an adult as those in a small group, since there appears to be an overall effect for class size, regardless of PTR.

Over a fifth (22.5%) of all naíonraí in the 1993 Census had ratios of more than 10 children per adult and almost a third (30.5%) of Galltacht naíonraí (with a second adult on call for emergencies), though insurance requirements now necessitate a ratio of no more than 10:1. The Child Care Act now also stipulates a maximum class size of 20 and a maximum ratio of 10 children per adult for sessional care, with a second adult available on the premises. However, from the point of view of naíonra objectives, it would appear to be a more effective strategy to aim to keep class sizes below at least 15, than to attempt to decrease the pupil-teacher ratio alone, since PTR does not appear to counteract the negative effect of class size, which persists even when the ratio is controlled for in the statistical tests. The STAR project (Achilles *et al.* 1993) also found that improving PTR did not overcome the effect of larger class size in their group of children from kindergarten up to age 8. They found that children in groups of 13-17 did significantly better at reading and mathematics than children in regular classes of 22-25, or children in a regular class (22-25) who also had a full-time teacher's assistant. Similarly, Sylva et al. (1980:165) concluded that 'the child under five thrives in small groups', where there is less general hubbub, allowing children to focus on their play. While the international research on class size is not unambiguous, there is now evidence that, in the early years in particular, and for children with lower academic ability, small classes significantly improve later achievement in reading and mathematics. In the naíonra, as was already discussed, a further complication is that the Irish competence of the Assistant may not be sufficient to allow this person to interact comfortably in Irish with the children, resulting most probably in decreased or inappropriate input to children who rely on this adult's competence to offset the effect of the large group in which they find themselves.

7.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter began by comparing some of the results of this study with Egan's (1981) study of the naíonraí. However, it was emphasised that the results of this bivariate analysis were inconclusive, and that fuller investigation of these effects required multivariate analysis, which takes account of the relationship between predictor variables. The following variables were found to play a key role in influencing children's achievement of the Irish production test:

> general cognitive ability, parents' Irish ability, home language Irish, current frequency of Irish use in the home, Gaeltacht location, Irish ability of Stiúrthóirí, naíonra located in school and number of children per session.

These variables were discussed in turn. Higher general cognitive ability is likely to speed children's progress in production in their L2, but lower ability children do still make significant gains in comprehension in their period in the naíonra. Parents' Irish ability affects the choice of language in the home, and is also linked to parents' socio-economic status and educational level, but it was found to have a significant effect alone, even when other variables were controlled for. The effect of having Irish as home language pinpoints the native Irish speakers among the children, but there was also evidence of an advantage for children from bilingual homes in production and comprehension results. The effect of current frequency of Irish use in the home points to the need to encourage parents to support their child's Irish acquisition in the naíonra as much as they can, through increasing their Irish use at home. The positive effect of Gaeltacht location, when other variables such as home language are controlled for, indicates the abiding influence of community use of the language. The influence of the Irish competence of Stiúrthóirí on the children's production scores highlights the need to bring *all* Stiúrthóirí and their assistants to at least an intermediate level of Irish competence as the required minimum, and preferably to higher levels of competence. The negative effect of school location on children's Irish production scores suggests that consideration be given to the possible advantages afforded by other locations in the setting up of new naíonraí, as well as consideration of ways to make school-based naíonraí more intimate both in appearance and in practice when no other venue is available. Finally, the negative effect of class size indicates that this factor cannot be overcome simply by increasing the number of adults in the class, but that ideally, consideration should be given to keeping naíonra size small.

Chapter 8

Summary and Conclusions

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter initially reviews each chapter of this study, and summarises some of the principal findings. Sections 8.9 onward discuss these findings in relation to the future operation of the naíonraí, with suggestions for facilitating their success. Section 8.9 looks at the needs of parents in relation to their children's attendance at naíonraí and Section 8.10 focuses on the role of the Stiúrthóir. Section 8.11 examines the priorities for future development of the naíonraí, looking at the role in the optimal functioning of the naíonraí of the parents, the Stiúrthóirí and An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, and also considering the operation of the naíonraí in the context of the work of other organisations. Section 8.12 considers the future impact of some social and legal changes on naíonraí and Section 8.13 notes research projects which would be of benefit. Section 8.14 presents some of the conclusions of this study.

This report makes clear that children attending naíonraí in Ireland are, in general, given access to a wide range of age-appropriate and stimulating activities in a supportive environment. In the majority of cases they are given their first exposure to Irish as their L2, and the progress they make in Irish comprehension and production in the naíonraí bears witness to the commitment and diligence of their Stiúrthóirí. Parents are also shown to be supportive of their children's Irish acquisition and report that they use Irish more frequently in their home after their child has begun attending a naíonra. Overall, it appears that the naíonraí provide a valuable service to children whose parents wish them to acquire or develop further their Irish competence at an early age, and they do so while providing an environment and activities which also aim to stimulate children's cognitive, social and emotional development. This option of immersion pre-schooling is regrettably not available to all children whose parents would choose it for them, but future investment in the naíonra service could allow more children to attend high quality early immersion, and would allow the committed workers involved in this service to continue and to develop their skills in the context of greater support from state education and Irish language bodies.

8.2 PRE-SCHOOLING IN IRELAND AND EARLY IMMERSION (CHAPTER 1)

Chapter 1 showed that there is a strong demand for pre-schooling services in the state, arising from societal changes such as the increased participation of women in the workforce, and a greater public awareness of the benefits of pre-schooling. However, the services currently provided for the majority of children are privately organised and funded, with relatively little state input in terms of planning or monitoring of standards. Recent changes in legislation will help to clarify the situation, but are unlikely to alter it fundamentally.

The success of immersion programmes internationally supports the parent-led demand for Irish-medium pre-schooling and primary schooling. The pedagogical approach advocated for the naíonraí emphasises the importance of play, with a range of developmentally appropriate activities which are accompanied always by the Irish needed to describe the child's needs, wants and actions. The philosophy underlying the naíonraí is, therefore, that the child's overall social, cognitive, motor, and personal skills should be promoted while they are being helped to acquire Irish. English is the home language for the majority of children attending naíonraí, and they are therefore at the very earliest stages of L2 acquisition. However, there are also children who have some exposure to Irish in their homes, and others who speak only Irish at home, both in the Gaeltacht and Galltacht, and for these children the naíonraí need to provide enrichment of their first language, at a level which is appropriate to their differing levels of Irish competence.

International research points to as many differences as similarities between the experience of immersion in different countries. However, it would be of benefit to build on the similarities that do exist in order to gain further from the experience of countries such as New Zealand and Catalonia, as well as Canada and Wales, in attempting to meet the needs of children, parents and teachers in Irish-medium pre-schools and schools. To this end, there is a need to foster communication with other early immersion systems, as well as local links between Irish-medium pre-schools and schools. Many of the problems facing early immersion in Ireland are experienced elsewhere, such as the training and in-service needs of teachers, the difficulty in finding appropriate teaching materials, and strategies for including parents. Continued communication with other systems, particularly those within the European Union, could increase the effectiveness of the solutions proposed.

8.3 CENSUS OF THE NAÍONRAÍ (CHAPTER 2)

The Census of the naíonraí showed that about 2,600 children attended 190 naíonra sessions in the year 1992-93, run by 174 Stiúrthóirí (some of whom operated more than one session per day) and 90 assistants. Most naíonraí were located in halls and other public buildings, with a little over a quarter in private homes, and a quarter in schools. Almost two-thirds of all naíonraí in the year 1992-93 had 15 children or fewer, but the remaining third had 16 children or more. About three-quarters had pupil-teacher ratios of up to 10 children per adult at that time, and the remainder had ratios of more than ten children per adult (with a second adult on call in case of emergencies, a system which is now no longer possible due to a change in insurance requirements. In addition, the implementation of the Child Care Act now requires a maximum ratio of ten children to each adult, with a second adult on the premises).

The Census showed that the majority of children attending the naíonraí were from English-only homes, while only about a quarter of Gaeltacht children were reported to come from Irish-only homes. Approximately one-third of Gaeltacht children attending naíonraí and one-sixth of Galltacht children were judged by Stiúrthóirí to come from homes in which both English and Irish were used.

After about two terms in the naíonra for the majority of children (and up to 5 terms for 19% who were spending a second year in the naíonra), Stiúrthóirí estimated the Irish skills of over 2,000 children in the naíonra Census. They reported (Table 2.6) that 14% of naíonra children in the Galltacht and 41% of naíonra children in the Gaeltacht had at least a 'good competence' in Irish; almost half of Galltacht naíonra children, and almost a third of Gaeltacht naíonra children could produce only some Irish phrases. Most of the remaining third of Galltacht naíonra children could produce only a few Irish words, and a minority had only comprehension of Irish.

The aims of this study included an assessment of the achievement in Irish comprehension and production of a sample of 225 children and the major factors which influenced that achievement. Other aims were an analysis of the profile of naíonra parents from their questionnaire, and an evaluation of the needs and strategies of Stiúrthóirí.

8.4 THE PROFILE OF NAÍONRA PARENTS (CHAPTER 3)

Parents are recognised as playing a pivotal role in revitalisation movements, in initiating immersion programmes and in extending use of the target language. Questionnaires from over 1,800 households provided demographic information on both parents where appropriate, their occupational groupings and educational levels, and their Irish competence and language background. About a quarter of respondents were living in the Gaeltacht, and the remainder in the Galltacht.

Most Galltacht parents with children attending a naíonra reside in urban areas, while the majority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents reside in rural areas, as might be expected. Almost half of naíonra mothers work outside of the home (either full time or part-time) which is twice as high as the proportion of working mothers among a sample representative of the general population of mothers of young children (as represented by the relevant sub-group of the ESRI 1987 national survey). Both fathers and mothers who choose to send their child to a Galltacht naíonra are more likely to have a non-manual occupation or be self-employed than the Gaeltacht or general population of fathers and mothers. Naíonra parents are significantly more likely to work in the professional/managerial or higher civil service sector than the ESRI sample of parents of pre-school children in the general population, indicating that parents in higher occupational status groupings are more likely to send their child to a naíonra. Nevertheless, up to a third of naíonra fathers, and almost a quarter of naíonra mothers are in manual occupations outside of farming.

Educational data also show that significantly more naíonra parents than parents of pre-school children in the general population have a Leaving Certificate qualification, and more naíonra parents have a third-level education. Thus, more highly educated parents are significantly better represented among those choosing to send their child to a naíonra than among the general population of parents. However, they are not simply an educated elite, since over a quarter of naíonra mothers and two-fifths of naíonra fathers had not reached their Leaving Certificate.

High levels of competence in Irish are significantly more frequent among naíonra parents than among the general population of adults represented by the ITÉ (1993) language survey. Galltacht parents who choose to send their child to a naíonra are somewhat more likely than the general population to have a good or native-like ability in Irish themselves. However, those with moderate or high Irish ability are still in a minority of about a quarter overall among naíonra parents (only about one-sixth of naíonra parents in the Galltacht have moderate to high ability in Irish, and over half of Gaeltacht naíonra parents). Over a third of Galltacht naíonra parents and one-fifth of Gaeltacht naíonra parents had weak-moderate competence in Irish at best (could participate in 'parts of conversations' in Irish) while almost half of Galltacht naíonra parents and one-fifth of Gaeltacht naíonra parents had either weak Irish competence or none at all. Thus, the overwhelming majority of Galltacht parents who chose a naíonra for their child had weak-moderate, weak or no Irish ability, indicating that even parents who do not have high levels of Irish competence themselves view attendance at a naíonra as a worthwhile and valuable experience for their children.

A majority of Galltacht naíonra parents grew up in homes where no Irish was used, while only about a third of Gaeltacht naíonra parents were from homes where Irish had always been used. Overall, more than half of naíonra parents themselves grew up in homes where only English was spoken. Most Galltacht naíonra parents had attended English-medium primary and secondary schools, while the majority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents had attended Irish-medium or part-Irish-medium primary schools, though this proportion dropped for secondary education to about two-fifths. The majority of Gaeltacht naíonra parents and about two-fifths of Galltacht naíonra parents wished to send their own child to an all-Irish primary school, while another quarter of each group would opt for schools where more than one subject was taught through Irish.

8.5 THE PARENTS AND THE NAÍONRAÍ (CHAPTER 4)

Parents' reasons for choosing a naíonra for their child, and their contact with the naíonra were investigated in Chapter 4. Most parents chose to send their child to a naíonra for a combination of language and educational reasons, but over a fifth of Galltacht naíonra parents decided on language grounds only (compared to about a tenth of Gaeltacht naíonra parents), and a fifth of all parents decided on a naíonra for non-language/educational reasons only. Most parents thought that Irish-medium pre-schooling was very important for a child whose parents were considering sending him/her to an Irish-medium primary school.

Parents reported that only about 1% of Galltacht children and less than a quarter of Gaeltacht children attending a naíonra had Irish as their only home language, although about another sixth of Galltacht and two-fifths of Gaeltacht children in the naíonra had heard English and Irish in their homes. Parents reported that less than a third of the Gaeltacht naíonra children were at least able for a conversation in Irish before they began attending the naíonra, indicating that in the mixed language homes, many children did not get enough exposure to Irish to be able to use the language productively.

Parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their decision to send their child to a naíonra, and the majority of children were reported to be happy there. More than half of all parents found that children began to use Irish words, rhymes or songs at home on a regular basis, and Gaeltacht parents in particular noted an increase in Irish conversation by their child. This increase in the children's Irish use at home was reflected in substantial increases in parents' own use. Parents were three times more likely to use Irish regularly with their child after the child began attending the naíonra than they had been before attendance, and there was a very significant decrease in those who never spoke Irish to their children at home.

Naíonra parents in English-only or bilingual households in general reported low involvement in Irish language activities such as listening to Raidió na Gaeltachta, or watching *An Nuacht*, reading Irish-language columns in national papers, or reading Irish story-books to their children. Less than a fifth of Galltacht naíonra parents had participated in Irish classes, Irish social events or Irish cultural activities, which may, in some part, be due to the lack of availability or accessibility of such activities and events, as well as to 'life-cycle' factors, since organising attendance at such activities can be particularly difficult for parents of young children.

Parents' involvement in the naíonra was in general fairly low, and this is likely to be linked to low Irish competence in a large proportion, as well as to the other family and work commitments of parents. Only about half of parents reported that they or their partner had attended an introductory meeting about the work of the naíonra. The main contact for parents was dropping off and collecting the child each day, and in checking on the child's progress at least monthly. The majority of parents never used naíonra books or tapes at home. Parents outlined their requirements to improve their contact with the naíonra and use of Irish at home, and these will be discussed further below.

8.6 SURVEY OF STIÚRTHÓIRÍ (CHAPTER 5)

The survey of Stiúrthóirí elicited information on the organisation of naíonraí, and details on the qualifications, experience and Irish competence of the Stiúrthóirí. The information on fees supplied indicated that almost a third of all naíonraí receive subsidies from Údarás na Gaeltachta. Fees per child for most of these naíonraí were less than £5 per week, while for unsubsidised naíonraí the weekly fees were on average £8 per week.

Stiúrthóirí come from a range of backgrounds, and up to a sixth are qualified as teachers, but the majority rely on the preparatory training course organised by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta for professional training. About half of Stiúrthóirí had between five and ten years' experience, and another quarter had more than 11 years' experience, indicating quite a low attrition rate. More than half of all Stiúrthóirí had native- or near-native-speaker Irish ability, but almost one-fifth had Irish which was described as 'satisfactory' at best by Comhairleoirí. Over two-fifths of the Assistants (Stiúrthóirí Cúnta) were reported to have 'weak' or, at best, 'satisfactory' Irish.

Stiúrthóirí appear, in general, to be a highly committed group, with a large proportion attending in-service courses frequently. They evinced a high level of interest in practical courses, but also in broader areas such as health issues and psychology. What is most desired by Stiúrthóirí is the opportunity to visit other naíonraí, and assistance to purchase new equipment. Up to a quarter of Stiúrthóirí were dissatisfied with the level of contact with their local primary schools, although there was higher satisfaction with the contact with local all-Irish schools. A majority of Stiúrthóirí reported that they would welcome parents who wished to help in the naíonra.

In terms of organisation of work, most Stiúrthóirí reported that they had a weekly and term plan, but less than half had a yearly plan. The activities most commonly available to each child every day in the final term were reported to be: home corner, jigsaws and building blocks. The average child engaged in story-telling and group games every day in fewer than half of all naíonraí. Comhairleoirí judged that a sixth of naíonraí offered an excellent choice and organisation of activities, and the majority were at least considered 'good', but about one-tenth had a poor range of activities, and up to a fifth were judged to be making poor use of activities to reinforce language use. Overall, Comhairleoirí indicated that about 20% of Stiúrthóirí were performing excellently, and 70% well or satisfactorily, with only about 10% performing weakly.

8.7 MEASURING IRISH ACHIEVEMENT IN THE NAÍONRA (CHAPTER 6)

Tests were developed to assess the Irish achievement of children in the naíonraí. These comprised tests of Irish comprehension, production and imitation. In addition, a test of general cognitive ability was devised. From the total population of children in the census of naíonraí in February 1993 a sample of 225 children was drawn, and this sample was weighted to ensure that it was representative of all naíonraí and children in this population. These tests were considered to be valid and reliable instruments.

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Mastery scores showed that almost all children were judged to have made at least minimal progress in Irish comprehension, while about half had made significant progress. Production scores were lower, with over half of the sample making at least minimal progress on this test, and less than a sixth making substantial progress. Overall scores on these tests showed the expected pattern of development, with the sampled children's Irish comprehension and imitation scores in advance of their Irish production. Home language also influenced scores in the expected direction, with a clear superiority of scores for children from Irish-only homes over those from homes where English and Irish were spoken, who in turn had higher scores than children from English-only homes.

8.8 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCES ON IRISH ACHIEVEMENT (CHAPTER 7)

Bivariate analysis indicated a number of factors which influenced test results. For example, such analyses showed that older children and those with higher general cognitive ability scores had significantly higher Irish production scores. Bivariate analyses also showed that residence in the Gaeltacht favourably influenced Irish production scores, and that use of Irish in the home resulted in higher Irish production scores (with children from all-Irish homes having an advantage over children from bilingual homes, who in turn, had an advantage over children from English-only homes). This effect of home language interacted with Gaeltacht residence, with Gaeltacht children scoring higher in each case than children from language-equivalent homes in the Galltacht.

Looking at naíonra-level factors, bivariate analyses indicated that, where Stiúrthóirí had native or near-native Irish competence, children had higher comprehension scores. It was also found that children in naíonraí located in private homes and halls had significantly higher Irish production scores than those located in schools, and children in naíonraí with 15 children or fewer also had higher Irish production scores than those in larger naíonraí. Bivariate analyses showed no significant effect on Irish scores for children in naíonraí with lower pupil-teacher ratios.

However, such analyses look at the effect of only one variable on the Irish scores at a time, whereas more sophisticated statistical analyses can take a number of variables into account at the same time. Multivariate analyses showed that the most reliably influential factors, when interactions between different factors were taken into account, could be divided into different groups, at child-, home- and naíonra-level. Most of the explained variance was accounted for at child- and home- level, with naíonra-level variables accounting for about a third of the explained variance. These multivariate analyses showed that, all other things being equal, a child's Irish production score could be expected to be higher if he or she had:

- an above average score in the General Cognitive Ability test;
- at least one parent with moderate or high ability in Irish;

- had Irish spoken to him or her as a baby and toddler;
- at least some Irish used currently in his or her home;
- lived in the Gaeltacht;
- had a Stiúrthóir with a good to fluent knowledge of Irish;
- attended a naíonra which was *not* located in a school; and
- attended a relatively small naíonra.

8.9 ASSISTING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Clark (1989:55) noted that the term 'parental involvement' may be used to describe very different levels of participation in pre-school education, ranging from non-participation, through support without involvement, to participation in the work of the unit either directly in the unit or at home, through partnership in management and control of the pre-school unit. Intervention studies have shown the efficacy of involving parents in promoting first language skills, usually through some targeted daily activities like reading to children and playing with them in the home, for a minimum time each day. In the case of the naíonraí, the statistical results show that it is the parents who are supplying Irish input to their children who are best supporting the children's Irish acquisition in the naíonra, and it would be beneficial to involve all parents in some Irish use at home to this end. Some strategies for achieving this wider support for Irish use at home are outlined below.

8.9.1 Irish Classes and Irish Materials for Parents

The effect of current use of Irish in the home, and parents' ability in Irish were noted as strong positive influences on children's Irish production scores in the analyses. The differences in the levels of Irish competence among parents requires naíonraí to cater for a range of children, from those who have very little or no Irish input at home, up to and including those who have exclusive Irish input. The policy of some naíonraí of offering Irish classes to parents, or at least information about classes, reflects this awareness of the benefits of improving parents' Irish competence, since they are significant players in their children's acquisition.

Irish Courses for Naíonra Parents

Clearly, parents with low levels of Irish ability have great difficulty in supporting their child's newly-learned Irish. However, only 11% of parents reported that they had attended an Irish class since their child began attending the naíonra. It must be noted that the period of having young children is not the life-stage most conducive to attending classes regularly in any subject, and this undoubtedly decreases the number of parents who can attend Irish classes. In addition, it is possible that parents find that the types of courses available for adult learners do not adequately meet their need to communicate in Irish with their young children.

It may be necessary, in order to reach this group, to look both at the suitability of *what* is taught in adult Irish classes, and also at the *format* in which it is taught. Regarding the material taught, it is possible that ordinary adult Irish classes are insufficiently focused for naíonra parents whose aim is to be able to discuss naíonra activities with their child at home. Such classes are likely to have a dearth of child-directed language and could therefore suffer from a de-motivating time-lag before parents see any benefit, in terms of being able to interact in Irish with their child.

'Self-Help' Irish Materials

Given this dual problem regarding course content and low rates of attendance, it might be worthwhile to explore other approaches. A first step would be to bring to parents' attention the self-teaching Irish aids already available. One useful aid already prepared by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, in conjunction with Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann, is the phrase-book *BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí/Basic Irish for Parents*. However, many parents appear not to be aware of this booklet (40% said that they would like 'samples of the phrases the children learn'). This booklet is supplied with a tape, which allows for use in the home and car, and could be an invaluable aid for parents who previously had good competence in Irish and need only to have their memory refreshed.

However, the disadvantage is that this is a phrase-book rather than a 'teach yourself' course, and it therefore lacks the role-play and repetition which would assist parents who have very low levels of competence. A more focused self-help book for parents based on the language listed in this phrase-book would be useful, if scenarios based on parent-child interaction were provided to illustrate the material presented, as well as language-learning exercises and repetition. This would have the added benefit of modelling the use of Irish in the home, which many parents may be reluctant to try because it feels unnatural. It would also be helpful if Stiúrthóirí could encourage parents to establish *ciorcail chainte* (conversation groups, already operating in some naíonraí and desired by a further fifth of parents), which would allow Irish learners to meet informally from time to time and interact with more proficient speakers with whom they have a common interest.

Information Packs

The parents of young children often feel under great time-pressure as they try to balance the needs of pre-school children with those of toddler or school-age siblings and, in many cases, their commitments outside of the home. In trying to reach this group, therefore, it is important that the demands made on them in terms of time and scheduling are realistic. It might also be effective to develop short information packs for them, as an alternative for those who cannot enrol in classes or longer 'teach yourself' projects. Thus, the 48% of parents who said that they wanted copies of the rhymes and songs learned by the children could be accommodated relatively easily, through the provision of a small number of pages of such material, distributed by Stiúrthóirí (as occurs already in some cases). Some parents would also benefit from very brief information sheets listing greetings, simple phrases, and a number of rhymes; again these could be distributed by the Stiúrthóir to those who request them. More detailed collections of rhymes and songs are contained in the tapes and booklets already available from An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, but again, it appears that many parents are unaware of their availability.

Parents might benefit from a general booklet of advice about how best to facilitate their child's learning, with information about what the child is learning and detailed suggestions regarding activities such as singing, playing and reading for parent and pre-naíonra or naíonra children, and specific examples of suitable material. Given the pivotal role of the home in supporting children's learning, and the reported increase in Irish use in the home after a child begins attending a naíonra, it would be most beneficial to draw parents into the process, through, for example, some of the following:

- informing them of and encouraging them to use simple phrases which are used in the naíonra (through video, booklet, fact-sheet and newsletter suggestions for Irish in specific contexts);
- encouraging them to play tapes (at home or in the car) of Irish rhymes and songs which the child is learning;
- encouraging them to read simple Irish books to the child at home, and assisting parents to choose suitable books; and
- developing a range of taped children's books in Irish as a support for parents with low levels of Irish ability.

Such information is provided in the 'Welsh for the Family' project (Brooke, 1992) in which the Welsh phrases and vocabulary needed in a range of situations appropriate to young children are presented attractively with pictures, and with English translations. Illustrations have items labelled in Welsh, so that a parent has the term available to draw it to the child's attention. Tapes and activity books are also available to reinforce the language learned by child and parent.

Taped Children's Books

Over half of Galltacht respondents in the parents' survey stated that they never read Irish story-books to their children, and a further third said they did so only occasionally. This may be linked to parents' feeling that their Irish is inadequate for the task of reading even a simple story in Irish. The use of taped story-books has also been shown to be a significant support for parent and child alike (see Hickey 1991 for a discussion), with exposure to native-speaker pronunciation, music and choruses to get children's attention, and the option of multiple repetition which has proved so beneficial (and enjoyable) for young learners. The numbers of such taped books in Irish is small at present, and it is imperative that this need be addressed in the near future. In the meantime, Stiúrthóirí might like to offer parents the opportunity of borrowing a selection of taped books which they had themselves spoken onto tape. The advantage of having a familiar voice on tape, reading a story familiar from the naíonra, would be a very positive feature, and the objective of increasing Irish reading in the home is worthy of this effort until commercial suppliers answer this need.

Parents' Newsletter

Even where excellent Irish materials are already available from An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, An Gúm and other sources, parents appear in many cases to be unaware of them. Over 80% of parents reported that they rarely or never used naíonra books or tapes at home. Lack of awareness of what is available is compounded by the poor chances of seeing any Irish materials displayed in the average bookshop, and this therefore requires some action. To this end, it is recommended that An Comhchoiste revive their newsletter, on a different basis, by directing it at parents once per term. This could be distributed in batches to naíonraí, allowing each child to take one home to his/her parent(s). Such a newsletter, which would need to be bilingual, could contain a list of some of the materials such as books, tapes of songs and taped books available in Irish, together with a few sentences describing each, with suggestions for their use. Letters could be solicited from parents who already use some Irish at home, to illustrate possibilities and phrases to parents new to using Irish with their children. A Stiúrthóir could outline some of the seasonal language which is likely to arise in each term, and present some of the relevant rhymes and phrases accompanying particular activities. It would also be of benefit to emphasise the value Stiúrthóirí place on parental support for Irish in the home, so that parents do not feel that they 'should leave that to the naíonra'.

Almost 40% of parents surveyed felt that their involvement with the naíonra was too low, but noted that this was mostly due to their domestic or work arrangements. Thus, the best way of communicating with this group would appear to be through a newsletter. Such material sent to parents, which they can read at their own convenience, and keep for future reference, might go some way to overcome the lack of awareness of what resources are available, and illustrate the benefits of their using as much Irish informally at home as possible. A newsletter would also address the need identified by the third of parents who said that they require assistance in selecting books and tapes in Irish for use at home, and the supply of such information to the remainder might encourage them to consider using some materials. Parents' newsletters have been found to be a successful way of imparting information about methods, activities and materials in many settings such as music and drama schools, and centralised preparation and batch delivery to naíonraí would keep costs down. Parents reported that their child's attendance at a naíonra significantly increased the amount of Irish used in the home. Therefore, any approach which aims at increasing Irish use in the home by the parents of young children, and further supporting the Irish acquisition of the children themselves, is one which should rightly claim support from Irish language organisations charged with promoting Irish use, since this parent-child nexus is acknowledged to be crucial in fostering bilingualism.

Children's Programmes in Irish

The provision of children's T.V. programmes in Irish on the new *Teilifís na Gaeilge* channel adds another focus for Irish use in the home between parents and children, allowing them to see Irish used in a recreational context together (initially in the programmes *Boisíní* and *Bouli).* However, to maximise their effectiveness, some of the programmes aimed at the pre-school age-group need to allow for the fact that even in the Gaeltacht, as well as elsewhere, a large proportion of these children are second language learners, and require a slower pace of presentation, a greater clarity of enunciation and a greater simplicity of language than is necessary for native-language speakers of Irish. These requirements make dubbed programmes less suitable for this age group, unless the original has been deliberately made slower than usual, such as the video series *Muzzy*. The value of repetition for language learning in young children and the pleasure they derive from repetition of the familiar, makes the provision of such programmes as *Boisíní* on video a high priority, to add to the small supply which already exists of Irish videos for children. The naíonra could play a central role in alerting parents to those children's programmes in Irish on TnaG as well as a number already broadcast on RTÉ, and to the availability of some videos of cartoons (e.g. *Bouli agus a Chairde, Bouli Arís, Réaltóg*).

The change in the broadcast time of pre-school programmes by TnaG, from their original slot at 12.30 p.m. to a new slot at 2.00 p.m., is welcomed. Naíonra census figures of 1993 showed that 46 naíonraí only finished at 12.30 p.m., while another 30 naíonraí were still in operation between 12.40 and 2.15 p.m. (having begun late in the morning), usually without access to a television. In addition, many English-medium play-groups and Montessori pre-schools are either just finishing or still running at 12.30, while many Infant classes in primary schools do not finish until 1.30 p.m. Thus, the shift to 2.00 p.m. is very important in making these programmes available to more young children. Overall, these programmes make an important contribution to raising the status of Irish among these children, and allowing them to have pleasant experiences of the language at home, where parents may join in watching with them. It is hoped that the range of programmes for young children will continue to be developed and that more broadcast time and resources can be devoted to this sector in the future.

Parents Participating in the Naíonra

Only a very small minority of parents help in the naíonra, and there may be a low ceiling on this type of involvement as a result of parents' other commitments and low levels of Irish competence. However, over two-thirds of Stiúrthóirí reported that they would welcome involvement from parents who wish to help, although only about one-fifth of Stiúrthóirí would themselves seek out such parental involvement, which may again be influenced by the fact that many parents have low Irish ability. It is suggested that those Stiúrthóirí who would welcome parents' visits to the naíonra should bring this to their attention as an open invitation, and suggest a rota of visits (at intervals convenient for the Stiúrthóir), since parents might otherwise be reluctant to ask for permission to participate. Even intermittent participation in the naíonra would give such parents a new perspective on the work there and the methods used, and would allow children to see adults other than their Stiúrthóir or Stiúrthóir Cúnta using Irish. However, such involvement would only be successful if individual Stiúrthóirí were at ease with the practice and initiated it voluntarily, and if the parents involved had sufficiently fluent Irish to be able to participate fully in activities.

Improving Attendance at Introductory Meetings

A major contact point between Stiúrthóirí and parents is the introductory meeting. However, only about half of respondents or their partners had attended such a meeting. This fairly low attendance points again to the need to communicate through written materials with the group which does not attend meetings. In addition, however, it might be possible to persuade parents who did not attend the introductory meeting to attend a meeting organised several weeks *after* their child had begun at the naíonra, when the issue of what was being learned, and how, might appear less abstract. While this would impose a burden on Stiúrthóirí and Comhairleoirí, who normally attend and speak at such meetings, it might be worth trying on an experimental basis.

8.9.2 Parent and Toddler Groups

The advantages of an ancillary service which would provide some experience of an Irish-language environment even before the naíonra has been discussed in *Seal le Chéile*, (no author) a document describing a pilot 'parent and child' programme organised by Bord na Gaeilge in 1992. This experience and the longer and wider experience of the *Kohanga reo* (Maori groups in New Zealand) and *Cylch Mam a'i Phlentyn* in Wales have illustrated the benefits of offering parents and children an opportunity to learn and speak a second language at a very young age, before they are even aware that what they are hearing is another language. In Wales there is provision for children under two and a half years to participate with their parents in groups called *Cylch Ti a Fi*, and children over two and a half years are involved in *Cylch Meithrin* groups. In the former ('Welsh for the Family') bilingual leaflets are provided with suggested activities for the groups, but also with aims for Welsh use at home e.g.:

> Goal: Learn to sing and read stories with your child at home
>
> *Sing*: Song X (reference to book and cassette)
> Practise singing 3 new songs every week. (from illustrated song-book)
> 1. Look at each picture and say the words aloud together.
> 2. Read the words of each song aloud.
> 3. Sing the song together (with the actions). Then sing it again!
>
> *Read*: 6 *Mabon and Mabli* stories (series, accompanied by free cassette tapes)
> Practise reading one new story every week.
> 1. Your leader reads a sentence aloud and tells you what it means.
> 2. Everyone reads the sentence aloud together before moving on to the next one.
> 3. If you want some extra practice, read the story again with a friend.

Sing with the Children (babies and all)

1. Sing and move (vigorously!) with the children at the end of the session
2. Help your child with the actions - that's how they learn what the song means!
3. Sing *Song X* last of all, while walking in a circle.

At Home

1. Sing several songs with your child every day. First look at the picture together and then sing the song (with the actions).
2. Read at least one Welsh story with your child every day.
3. Read each new story EVERY day during the first week.

Such detailed instructions, which ask for a small daily time commitment in the home, are more likely to be successful than general instructions which do not specify regular activities. With regard to the meetings themselves, allowing parents to remain with their toddlers ensures that children feel supported and relaxed, and involves parents directly in the child's learning, thus promoting use of the language at home also. Parents are given an opportunity to improve their own Welsh through conversation with other adults and through the learning of specific vocabulary.

One workable model for the provision of such parent and toddler groups comes from Ballinteer in Dublin, where a group of parents founded a co-operative movement called *Na Mamailínigh*. A voluntary co-ordinator helps to put parents in contact with each other and organises small groups of no more than six parents and their children. These meet in each other's homes (on a rota) once a week for about two hours, and engage in activities such as painting, water-play, reading/telling stories, playing games, singing songs etc. through Irish. No special premises are required, and such groups are therefore an option for any small group or even two parents who are willing to organise themselves. Children attending can be aged from several months only up to about three years, and at this age are extraordinarily open to language learning. Such young children who feel happy and safe while with their parent are extremely accomplished learners with few inhibitions about producing what they know, and adding to it. After a period in such a group a child can begin attending a naíonra already with some comprehension of Irish, and a quite sizeable productive vocabulary of words and phrases which increases the level of Irish use in the naíonra and provides a most effective model for other children who have not been exposed to Irish. Just as importantly, parents who have participated in such groups already understand the importance of their own role in fostering the child's language acquisition, so they are less likely to retreat to the sidelines of low involvement in the work of the naíonra.

To function most effectively, parents considering setting up such a group would benefit from a 'starter pack', presenting information bilingually on the aims of such a mother and toddler Irish group, with detailed suggestions for activities and a range of plans for the meetings. This pack would also supply the text of rhymes and songs and full instructions on the actions to accompany them. Recommended vocabulary and suggestions for introducing it could also be included, with information for parents about the type of language required, including, for example, *BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí*. Finally, it would be important to include a list of books in Irish for this age group, and suggestions regarding how to present them, with an explanation of the vocabulary used. Some centralised co-ordination would contribute significantly to the success of such efforts, in helping to get groups going, and in keeping them focused and effective.

8.9.3 Parents' Expectations and Objectives

There is a need for parents, in particular, to have realistic expectations regarding the outcome of a period in a naíonra for children from each of the typical language backgrounds. A year in a naíonra is likely to give a child from an English-only background a good comprehension of the Irish used in the naíonra and an ability to produce a small amount of Irish, some of which may not be fully productive as yet. A child from a home in which at least some Irish is used is likely to show better productive skills, as well as more advanced comprehension. Children from Irish-only homes are likely to show improvement in their production, with increased Irish vocabulary; they may, in addition, acquire some English from other children attending.

Krashen (1985:66) described immersion as 'the most successful program ever recorded in the professional language teaching literature'. There are, in general, very high expectations for children's L2 language learning in immersion situations, with a widespread belief that children emerge from such schools after a number of years with native-like competence in the language, at no cost to their mother tongue development or their academic achievement. In fact, however, it has been recognised by some immersion researchers that this is not the case. Instead, as Cohen (1982:105) noted, results as early as the mid- to late 1970s, from Spanish immersion in the US and French immersion in Canada showed that children in these programmes did *not* achieve native-like mastery of the second language. In fact, they reached a very satisfactory level of communicative ability, which is, nevertheless, an interlanguage, showing the effects of interference from their native language and inconsistent L2 rule application. Safty (1989:551), in describing high-school graduates of immersion programmes, commented on their spontaneous, natural communication and 'charmingly self-assured and oblivious attitudes toward their mistakes'. He stressed that the communicative approach used in immersion education is bound to achieve this result, since it emphasises what is being said, rather than how it is being said. Cohen explains the entrenched grammatical errors of immersion students as resulting from the fact that they spend most of their time listening to other learners, who reinforce each other's second language errors.

Safty argues that the most effective remedy for entrenched grammatical errors in older immersion pupils is high quality input, with weekly group practice on the correct form of structures which have a high error rate in the group. Stiúrthóirí are trained in this strategy in their preparatory course. Regarding pre-school children in immersion, the issue of quality and quantity of Irish input is one which needs to be stressed, as was discussed in Chapter 5, with a subtle shift in the balance of activities towards those that maximise

Irish input from the Stiúrthóir. Safty also proposes that socio-cultural exchanges with native speakers of the language should be promoted in order to increase quality input. In the case of naíonra children living in the Galltacht this would be very difficult. One answer might be to encourage parents to bring their children on visits to the Gaeltacht. In the parents' survey it was found that less than half of the Galltacht parents had visited the Gaeltacht in the preceding 4 years. However, it must be remembered that, regardless of the community involved, visitors usually find it extremely difficult to make contact with local people, particularly where another language is involved, and this is as true of visitors to the Gaeltacht who do not have family or friends resident there as it is true of holiday-makers around the world. For this reason, more organised schemes such as that run by *Cumann an Phiarsaigh* in Donegal may be most effective. Cumann an Phiarsaigh now offers one-week holiday/Irish-courses for entire families, where parents have the opportunity to attend Irish classes while babies are cared for in a crèche, pre-schoolers in a naíonra, and children up to ten years of age attend age-appropriate classes. Parents and children stay in the college, and sight-seeing trips, amusements, céilí-dancing and Irish music events are organised for leisure activities.

Such short holidays in the Gaeltacht allow young children to spend a couple of hours each day with a Stiúrthóir, and experience life in a Gaeltacht area. Some wider experience of the use of Irish in the Gaeltacht might be gained, through, for example, visits to a local shop where Irish is spoken, or a visit from a mother with her toddler who is acquiring Irish. Parents can avail of this time to improve their Irish ability and gain enjoyment from Irish cultural activities, as well as have a pleasant visit to a Gaeltacht with their children enjoyably occupied. If, in addition to these activities, there was an attempt by the organisers to facilitate interaction with Gaeltacht parents, as well as to encourage visitors to speak Irish when taking their children to any local amenities such as a craft-shop, then the basis might also be laid down for future independent visits to the Gaeltacht. The development of this initiative is greatly to be welcomed, and it is hoped that other options, such as shorter (3-day) courses might be added in the future, for example at Easter or half-term breaks, in a range of venues and Gaeltacht areas.

8.9.4 Practical Facilitation of Naíonra Attendance

This study showed that naíonra mothers are twice as likely to be engaged in work outside the home as the general population of mothers of young children. Of the approximate 50% of naíonra mothers who participate in the labour force, half were engaged in part-time work. Given this feature of naíonra parents, and the wider trend towards women's increased participation in the labour market, parents' needs will, in the future, require some consideration. Parents may have to consider the hours of naíonra operation in their decision-making process regarding the type of pre-schooling for their child. It would be most unfortunate if naíonraí, which at present attract about half of their children from homes where both parents work full- or part-time outside the home, were to exclude the children of some working parents because of practical problems such as difficulties with their hours of operation. Almost half the naíonraí (47%) in the naíonra census finished at or before 12.00 noon. Such closing times may pose difficulties even for part-time workers, since they often work either for full mornings or afternoons and would not therefore be able to collect children before their work period ends. Similarly, only 21% of naíonraí in the census opened at or before 9.15 a.m., which may again pose problems for working parents whose jobs require them to be in work for office hours. It appears that the current hours of naíonra operation depend on the availability of a parent or child-carer in the home, and may exclude a group of parents who would like to choose a naíonra for their child, and could afford to pay for it, but have difficulty organising child care to accommodate the naíonra hours, even when one parent is working only part-time. Even parents who are full-time home-makers may experience difficulties due to the lack of co-ordination between naíonra opening and closing times and the times of the school which other children in the family attend.

It is accepted that young children become tired after their session in a challenging environment. Nevertheless naíonraí in some areas might consider adding an optional (and paid) extra period of after-naíonra care (of up to one hour's duration), with suitable and less challenging activities, to make the option of a naíonra available to parents who cannot arrange to have children collected mid-morning. According to the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations 1996, sessional pre-school services may be up to three and a half hours in duration per session. In this regard, it is noteworthy that some Montessori pre-schools already operate for longer periods of up to three and a half hours, and some individual groups offer after-care up to 2 p.m. or full day-care after a Montessori session in the morning, indicating that even young children can be happily accommodated for somewhat longer periods, provided that activities are varied, suitable, and paced over the morning. Consideration of such extra periods of care would, of course, raise practical issues such as insurance cover and would depend on local demand. However, the fact that not all parents need or want to avail of such an option should not rule out local provision where it is desired, especially in urban areas. The current situation in which some parents may rule out sending their child to a naíonra because of difficulties with naíonra hours of operation is unsatisfactory. The option of having children attend both sessions of a two-session naíonra (because of difficulties in arranging to have the child collected or of organising child-care after naíonra hours) is also not ideal. Attending two naíonra sessions is likely to be much more taxing than attending a slower-paced single session over a similar time-span.

It is relevant that Basque and Catalan immersion pre-schools operate from 9.00 a.m.-12.00 p.m., with a break for lunch, and a rest during which the child may be collected and brought home, *or* may stay in the pre-school, resuming at 3.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m. This is not simply the effect of Mediterranean daily cycles, since in Finland, Swedish-immersion pre-schools operate to the same schedule, with a long lunch-break and rest followed by resumed 'classes'. The growth in the number of women participating in the labour force in Ireland has been discussed already in Chapter 1, and it is important that some awareness of the constraints of parents who work outside the home or of those caring for other children should be considered in the future by the naíonraí. At present, those who require longer hours of care for their children are being given the option only of English-medium child-care, which has expanded greatly in recent years. It is, therefore, important that in coming years consideration should be given, where possible, to the provision of short after-naíonra care programmes through Irish, in order to ensure that the naíonra option is available to the children of all parents. Further consideration of these issues is recommended in the future, so that the best compromise can be reached between children's needs and the constraints under which parents (either those working outside the home or those at home with other children) operate.

8.10 SUPPORT FOR STIÚRTHÓIRÍ

Stiúrthóirí in naíonraí fulfil a demanding role, generally with great zeal and commitment, for low remuneration. They require a range of personal and inter-personal skills, but in addition they require high quality pre-service and in-service training. These and other requirements of Stiúrthóirí are discussed below. Some of these issues have been discussed at length in previous chapters, and will not be examined in depth again here.

8.10.1 Irish Competence

Stiúrthóirí and their Assistants are, in many cases, the only source of Irish input for children, and their fluency in expressing themselves in Irish in the naíonra situation can, therefore, be a critical factor in influencing the children's rate of progress in acquiring Irish. The results of the statistical analysis suggest that children whose Stiúrthóirí have 'weak' or 'satisfactory' Irish have significantly lower Irish Production scores that those in naíonraí where the Stiúrthóir's Irish is rated as 'good' or (as good as) that of a native speaker. This suggests that an intermediate level of competence in Irish be established as a minimum required level of Irish competence by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta for those setting up naíonraí. This would represent an attainable target for the 18% of Stiúrthóirí already practising whose Irish falls below this level, and it is recommended that they be given every encouragement and practical support to improve their standard to this level, and preferably beyond it. Similarly, it is recommended that prospective Assistants in the future should have reached the minimum standard before they are employed, and that the two-fifths of already employed Assistants who have weak Irish be offered short intensive courses to raise their standard of Irish above its present low level.

8.10.2 Location

It is acknowledged that there are many difficulties in finding suitable premises for naíonraí. The implementation of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 has added to these difficulties, although the improvement in overall standards of safety is to be welcomed. The decline in the cohort of children attending schools in some areas means that classrooms in schools may be the most easily available location for a naíonra (about a quarter of naíonraí in 1993 were located in schools). Children in such naíonraí in the sub-sample were found to have lower production scores than those in naíonraí located in private homes and halls. The disadvantage for school-based naíonraí may arise from children feeling somewhat overawed by the school atmosphere and the hustle and bustle of being in the vicinity of older children, but the location effect may also influence teaching style or the range of activities provided in a subtle way. While the negative result of school location must be interpreted cautiously, given that it was based on a relatively small sample, it is supported by Osborn and Milbank's (1987) study of preschool effectiveness, and this points to the need for further monitoring of the effect. Naíonraí currently operating in schools need to be aware of the need to operate in as 'home-like' a manner as possible, rather than in the manner of infant reception classes. In the meantime, it is recommended that the advantage attested to by the results of this study of locating in premises other than schools be considered in promoting the setting up of new naíonraí. The difficulty in finding suitable premises is likely to be a major factor in constricting the growth of naíonraí in the future, and the adaptation of premises to make them suitable for naíonraí will require additional resources if the naíonra option is to be more widely available.

8.10.3 Class Size and Pupil-Teacher Ratio

The statistical analysis showed that overall class size was inversely related to children's Irish production scores, independently of pupil-teacher ratio, which did not have a significant effect. Multivariate analyses showed that the negative effect of larger class sizes (despite a lower pupil-teacher ratio in most such classes), was found to be greatest in the Galltacht, where it seems that larger naionraí depress children's Irish Production scores. Over a third of all naíonraí contained 16 children or more in 1993 and these results point to the value of seeking to reduce the number of large naíonraí where possible, and to aim in general to keep naíonraí below a maximum of 15 children.

There are, of course, practical difficulties in keeping naíonraí small, but these results suggest that including an adult assistant does *not* compensate for the overall negative effect of larger class size. Thus, the phasing in by An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta of a maximum naíonra size of 15 children (in addition to its current maximum pupil-teacher ratio) by a particular time would be worth considering. After that point, all naíonraí would be expected to operate within that maximum. Naíonraí which currently contain more than this number could avail of the intervening period to establish another session, run by the same Stiúrthóir or another one, and either in the same premises at a different time, or in new premises at the same time. Clearly there are difficulties in some areas in answering the demand for naíonra places, but if the service to be provided to children is to be of the highest quality, then these results indicate the value of keeping the overall naíonra size down to no more than 15 children (with two adults, in consequence of the maximum 10:1 rule now operating).

8.10.4 Fees and Subsidies

At present, Gaeltacht naíonraí receive a subsidy from Údarás na Gaeltachta, which keeps the fees charged to parents at a lower level, provided they maintain a pupil-teacher ratio of no more than 10:1. Galltacht naíonraí do not receive such a subsidy, and the average fee paid per child per week in 1993 was £8, compared to an average of £5 per week in the

Gaeltacht. With the current level of fees, most Stiúrthóirí are left with very low wages after paying their costs. Looking to the future, two factors can be identified which will raise costs and/or reduce the income of Stiúrthóirí. The Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations now impose welcome but expensive safety requirements which may need investment to adapt premises. Similarly, a decrease in the number of children catered for would reduce income. Unless these factors are offset by measures to raise revenue or reduce costs, an undesirable reduction in the number of naíonra places could occur.

Ó Muirthile (Irish Times, 29 February 1996) pointed out that Irish-medium pre-schooling is the Irish language activity which receives most finance from individual members of the public, in the form of fees paid by parents, yet has relatively low levels of state support in the Galltacht. One option would be the provision of a subsidy to Galltacht naíonraí to help them to function at their optimal level with smaller groups, along the lines of the subsidy received by naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas from Údarás na Gaeltachta. Extending the capitation fee which currently applies to children in Gaeltacht naíonraí to Galltacht naíonraí would provide improved services such as allowing smaller classes, but would also have the benefit of regularising the employment conditions of Stiúrthóirí, with increased security and higher morale. While there are clearly many competing demands on state-sponsored bodies charged with promoting Irish, the evidence suggests that the naíonraí have considerable potential, not only for improving the learning of Irish by children, but also for promoting greater family use of Irish. An extension of the subsidy received by Gaeltacht naíonraí to all naíonraí would offer very good returns in terms of promoting Irish, not only among the children attending, but also among their parents.

Some parents, too, could be expected to pay more, particularly if naíonra hours were extended and if the training of Stiúrthóirí were extended and accredited. Current naíonra fees are relatively low compared to other child-care options (for example, five days' half-day care would cost in the region of £30 per week in a crèche or with many child-minders). Thus, some increase in fees could be justified, on a commercial basis. Of course, measures would need to be taken to safeguard the ethos of equality of accessibility to naíonra places for all socio-economic groups. To this end, the public subsidy discussed above might be used to establish a proportion of 'assisted places' in Galltacht naíonraí. This maintenance of low fees for families with lower incomes, but with a public subsidy, combined with some increase in fees for those with higher incomes, would go some way towards improving the position of naíonraí and their Stiúrthóirí. Improving terms of pay and conditions for Stiúrthóirí is likely to lead to an increase in the overall number of naíonra places available, thereby helping to make naíonraí an option which is available to more children.

8.10.5 Pre-Service Training

At present, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta is endeavouring to gain recognition from the National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) or the National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) for a pre-service course for naíonra leaders through the medium of Irish. The brevity of the current preparatory course is a cause for some concern, given the large amount of information to be conveyed. Ó Murchú (1985) has already suggested that a one-year full-time course would be desirable for prospective Stiúrthóirí, and this report concurs with the recommendation that pre-service training be extended and developed. However, given the difficulties this would pose for those wishing to become Stiúrthóirí, especially those who do not have easy access to educational institutions, the option of distance-learning needs to be explored for at least some modules of such a course, so that Stiúrthóirí in rural areas are not disadvantaged. One possibility is that the completion of a core of modules, including some attendance at tutorials and group meetings (as in the distance-learning framework) might be recognised for certification.

Recent developments seeking to establish common accreditation for those already working in early child-care are likely to be of great benefit to Stiúrthóirí. The OMNA project, operating under the aegis of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), with funding from New Opportunities for Women (NOW), aims to reach common agreement between the accrediting bodies and training organisations involved in early childhood training. It is claimed that a 'ladder' of national accreditation will offer greater flexibility both in access to, and progress through, early childhood training, with opportunities to enter employment at different levels. Such flexibility might offer the option of combining specialist training courses in early Irish immersion and Irish language skills with more general courses on, for example, child development or safety. However, it is important that training for Stiúrthóirí should stress the specific and fundamental needs of early immersion, rather than presenting it as an optional extra to be added to mother-tongue pre-schooling.

Other recent developments regarding the recognition of the experience of those already working as Stiúrthóirí are most welcome, and will ultimately improve their status. The Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) scheme was set up by the OMNA project to try to assess and give credit for the knowledge, experience and skills of existing practitioners. The OMNA project also aims to develop alternative learning methods such as distance-learning and media-based learning to assist in training, as well as extended work experience programmes. Proposals for training Stiúrthóirí in the distance-learning format are also being considered by Údarás na Gaeltachta, and such schemes would be most effective in providing further training leading to certification.

8.10.6 In-Service Training

In their survey, Stiúrthóirí reported that they would welcome some very practical courses, such as on handicrafts and the use of puppets, but significant proportions of respondents also indicated that broader areas such as health issues and psychology are of interest to them. It is notable that many of the subjects on which courses are desired relate to general pre-schooling activities, rather than dealing directly with the issue of immersion pre-schooling. However, it is of great importance that in-service courses on these topics should include consideration of the possibilities for language learning in every activity, so that the children's exposure to natural but contextualised use of the language can be maximised.

In-service training is organised on a divisional basis by each Comhairleoir in the ten districts in the Republic as well as in Northern Ireland, in order to provide training as locally as possible. However, this may make it difficult to offer courses on specific topics when the most interested participants are scattered throughout the country, rather than being located within one Comhairleoir's district. Given this problem, and the burden of preparing in-service training which falls on individual Comhairleoirí in addition to their other duties, it might be worth considering whether some courses at least could be centrally organised, but provided locally at dates and venues organised by Comhairleoirí. Thus, if An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta were to organise speakers and materials for a small number of in-service training courses on topics requested by a proportion of Stiúrthóirí throughout the country, they could be provided in different locations, thereby combining some of the benefits of regionalisation with some of the economies of scale of centralised planning. A range of videos dealing with at least some of the topics Stiúrthóirí request for training courses would greatly facilitate the organisation of in-service courses in all districts, particularly when used in conjunction with experienced Stiúrthóirí or visiting speakers acting as discussants, and would also allow greater ease in the repetition of courses for new Stiúrthóirí.

This study will allow the more detailed requirements of Stiúrthóirí regarding in-service training to be taken into account in future planning, in order to build most usefully on their experience. With regard to their future training needs, particularly for the 10% who are judged by Comhairleoirí to be performing poorly in specific areas, it should be noted that international research on in-service training for teachers (discussed in Chapter 5) has highlighted some basic problems with the concept as it often operates, and proposed measures to make it more effective. Consideration of all these factors is required to ensure that the Stiúrthóirí, particularly those in need of re-training or additional training, receive the most appropriate in-service training possible in the future. It is such training which will contribute most to the effectiveness of the naíonraí and produce the best results.

It should be noted that 30% of the Stiúrthóir respondents indicated that they found it difficult to attend in-service courses due to time pressures. Again, this points to the need to reach Stiúrthóirí by a combination of methods, through the provision of written materials and the establishment of a library of videotapes, as well as the current type of courses. Overall, the 28% who responded that they would find new training courses helpful and the 53% who said they wished to visit other naíonraí are pointing to a need which in-service training could profitably address.

8.10.7 Professional Isolation

As noted above, over half of Stiúrthóirí expressed an interest in visiting other naíonraí, and a third wished for more contact with other Stiúrthóirí. Isolation from other naíonraí may make the job of running a naíonra more difficult. While visits from Comhairleoirí are a resource in providing contact with the central organisation, they cannot substitute for peer contact. International research on in-service training (Brine and Shapson, 1989) has shown that opportunities to interact with peers and share ideas and help are of great importance. Given the risk of professional isolation for Stiúrthóirí, a pairing arrangement between Stiúrthóirí, as discussed in Section 5.5, might help to overcome the sense of isolation from peers, if they could meet informally or at least have telephone contact at intervals.

Another form of professional contact is with local primary and all-Irish schools. It is regrettable that as many as two-thirds of Stiúrthóirí have little or no contact at all with their local English-medium school, and one-third have little or no contact with their local all-Irish school. Since some children attending a naíonra may go on to attend a local primary school, the facilitation of communication between Stiúrthóirí and infant class teachers would be beneficial for the child. It is suggested that Comhairleoirí assist Stiúrthóirí in setting up meetings with the infant teacher and school principal initially, in order to improve communication, and, where appropriate, arrange reciprocal visits with the Junior Infants' teacher.

Overall, however, the issue of recognition by schools is a contentious one, which is based on the marginalisation of pre-school education by the educational system, and it can only be fully addressed by seeking official recognition of the rights of all children to high quality pre-schooling services. Ultimately, recognition for immersion pre-schooling is likely to require extension and certification of pre-service training for Stiúrthóirí and a regularisation of their employment conditions.

8.10.8 Equipment

New equipment occurs second on the 'wish list' of Stiúrthóirí. New naíonraí receive a kit worth about £300, but additional or replacement equipment and toys must be resourced by the naíonra. The money received by naíonraí from parents' fees and grants (generally in the case of Gaeltacht naíonraí) from other bodies must therefore cover rent, insurance, heat, light and equipment, as well as salary, and Stiúrthóirí are forced to forego items which they think would make their naíonra more effective and enjoyable. The result is that many Stiúrthóirí and parents are obliged to expend a great deal of energy on fund-raising, and the constant under-resourcing highlights the absence of official support for pre-schooling. In addition to the lack of money for necessary equipment it must be noted that there are also fewer appropriate teaching aids available for an Irish-medium pre-school than for their English-medium counterparts. Bodies such as An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta and An Gúm have helped to redress this situation to some extent through the provision of a number of appropriate books, wall-friezes, posters and tapes. However, further resources are required to enable Stiúrthóirí to purchase a range of such materials for naíonraí and to update and extend these materials each year.

8.10.9 Irish Input: Teaching Strategies and Children's Activities

The range of activities provided each day in naíonraí (see Chapter 5) shows the range of skills which are being promoted, quite apart from purely linguistic skills. Snow (1987) pointed out that immersion teaching is not simply a question of taking the standard curriculum and teaching it through another language. Instead it would appear to necessitate a bottom-up change in teaching strategy, so that all activities, whether focusing on manual, motor or social skills, are adapted to maximise their effectiveness for exposing children to the target language. The intention would not be to discard less language-centred activities, but to ensure a balance between the different types of activities engaged in by each child over the course of a session. As Section 5.4 showed, it is advisable that the linguistic return on the common activities of the naíonra be considered in the planning and organisation of work. Thus, instead of aiming to be identical to a mother-tongue play-group or pre-school (except for the fact that it uses what is the L2 of the majority as its medium) the ideal naíonra would seek to balance activities, groupings and teaching strategies in order to maximise Irish input and opportunities to use the language learned.

It is now almost a folklinguistic belief that young children acquire a second language more easily than older children or adults, but this has contributed to the belief that their learning occurs so 'naturally' that it requires little special provision. This belief in the naturalness of the young child's acquisition rests, of course, on observation of young children acquiring their first language. However, there are large differences between the concentrated input received by the L1 learner, surrounded by native speakers of the target language who focus large amounts of time and attention on that child, and the pre-school L2 learner in a group with other learners, with input usually from one or, at most, two adults, who must divide their time not only between a number of children, but also between educational and maintenance activities. This raises the question of what proportion of time in the naíonra supplies comprehensible Irish input directed to children and what are the opportunities for children to interact in Irish. Only an observational study can shed light on how much Irish input is available to individual children as they participate in the activities of the naíonra. Hickey (in preparation) will examine this issue with observational data.

Stiúrthóirí in the present study were asked to report on the range of activities available to the average child in a normal session during the third term. The results indicate that Stiúrthóirí, in general, make every effort to make children's experience of the naíonra as stimulating and enjoyable as possible, by providing a wide range of activities in a supportive environment. However, the issue of the type and amount of Irish input and opportunities to interact in Irish which accompany each activity may be critical to the successful implementation of Irish-medium pre-schooling, particularly where, as in the majority of naíonraí, the Stiúrthóir is the only source of Irish input.

8.11 PRIORITIES

The following sections outline some of the main suggestions arising from this report, categorised according to the relevant organisations or groups. These suggestions are made within the context of the organisations and structures currently in operation, although it is accepted that organisational changes would create other possibilities. Such suggestions are given under specific headings for the sake of clarity, although it is acknowledged that the organisations involved may have other priorities in some cases. The implementation of these suggestions would require extra funding and resources but what this study shows is that such additional investment would pay dividends in terms of assisting Irish learning among young children and promoting use of Irish in the home.

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

- It is suggested that An Comhchoiste consider establishing a required level of Irish competence for Stiúrthóirí and their Assistants, to be implemented immediately for all new candidates, and phased in for current personnel, with the provision of support to enable them to raise their level of Irish at least to this required competence level. An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta is currently considering a proposal regarding the provision of suitable courses in Irish to Stiúrthóirí during short stays in the Gaeltacht, and this proposal is welcomed. It is suggested that funds be sought for a number of scholarships for Stiúrthóirí and Assistants to attend such courses each year, allowing those who fall below the minimum Irish competence level to improve their Irish sufficiently. This would make a significant contribution to the overall effectiveness of the naíonraí.

- The current attempts by An Comhchoiste to establish a longer and more comprehensive pre-service course, with accreditation from a national educational award body is a welcome and necessary development. Given the rural location and family commitments of many of those interested in becoming Stiúrthóirí, it is suggested that this new course allow the option of completing at least some modules by distance-learning (i.e. in an open university-type context). The OMNA project's attempt to establish common accreditation for early childhood training and flexible approaches to learning accords with these objectives, and it is suggested that An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta continue to explore these new avenues. Similarly, the APL initiative to recognise the prior learning of practitioners is a welcome development and it is hoped that it will be applied to Stiúrthóirí, so that they have their professional skills recognised. It is vital that a significant proportion of pre-service training should deal specifically, and at length, with the methodology and strategies needed for immersion pre-schooling, as well as assisting students to acquire at least the necessary standard of Irish ability. However, some courses on wider issues such as health and safety, or management, which are common to all types of pre-schooling, could be shared with those training for English-medium pre-schools.

- Immersion pre-schooling imposes particular demands regarding the teaching strategies used, and the activities offered to children, and it is, therefore, of great importance that both pre- and in-service training emphasises the desirability of maintaining a balance between different types of activities and groupings in order to maximise input in Irish to the children in the naíonra. The aim of providing as much appropriate Irish input as possible requires planning from the bottom-up in organising activities, rather than a top-down approach of adding Irish to the normal activities of an L1 play-group. The balance achieved must be sensitive to the language mix within particular groups, the social dynamic among the children, and the range of other needs being met in the naíonra. Such a complex issue requires longer pre-service training than is currently available, plus regular support from in-service training.

- It is suggested that the in-service training offered at present would benefit from some centralised organisation of particular courses, which could then be offered in different regions. This might allow the diverse needs of Stiúrthóirí to be addressed more efficiently. The provision of videotaped information is also recommended, given the difficulties some Stiúrthóirí have in attending courses, and such videos could also be used in conjunction with guest speakers, and/or commented on by Stiúrthóirí at in-service courses. Further exploration of distance-learning and multi-media-based learning would also benefit in-service training.

- Over half the Stiúrthóirí would like to visit other naíonraí. Videos of different groups in operation, with discussion afterwards among a group of Stiúrthóirí might address this need, where actual visits cannot be arranged for practical reasons.

- Given the effect of class size on the children's Irish scores, it is suggested that priority be given to reducing naíonra size to a maximum of 15, in addition to the current move to reduce pupil-teacher ratios.

- The results of this study (supported by related research by Osborn and Milbank, 1987) suggest that there may be some disadvantages related to locating naíonraí in schools. Further research is needed on this topic, but, in the meantime, the current policy of discouraging location in private homes and encouraging location in schools needs to be reconsidered and monitored in light of these possible disadvantages. Stiúrthóirí of naíonraí already located in schools might consider ways of making the naíonra more home-like, both in physical appearance and in work organisation and activities. The Regulations of the Child Care Act require naíonraí to meet new safety and other operating standards. It would be most regrettable if the result were a reduction in the number of naíonraí operating from private homes, given their favourable results in this and other studies. Some form of subsidy to allow for the adaptation of existing premises is recommended, in order to maintain and develop the pool of naíonraí.

- Many naíonraí, especially those in the Gaeltacht, have children from a mixture of language backgrounds (such as those from Irish-only, or Irish and English homes, mixed in with those from English-only homes). It is suggested that An Comhchoiste consider extending the in-service training in language enrichment to meet the more advanced language needs of children who are native-speakers of Irish as L1, or early simultaneous bilinguals. Such enrichment could be provided in time set aside before the start, or at the end of the naíonra session each day or several days a week. Alternatively, if an Assistant is available, then it could involve taking such children in a group for a short time during the normal session.

- Opportunities for professional advancement are, at present, highly restricted among Stiúrthóirí, and the establishment of a mentor system with a *Sár-Stiúrthóir* grade among the more experienced and effective Stiúrthóirí (perhaps in conjunction with the APL initiative) would provide both recognition of their skills and some sought-after interaction with other Stiúrthóirí, likely to be of particular benefit for newer Stiúrthóirí. There is a pressing need to accord higher status and pay to Stiúrthóirí in general, but it is likely that this will be achieved only slowly, and will require the new pre-service training courses with accreditation currently being considered and greater involvement by the state in pre-school education. However, reconsideration of the terms of employment of Stiúrthóirí, following notification under the Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations, would greatly benefit the circumstances and morale of those involved in providing this service.

- Comhairleoirí provide a very useful and effective voluntary service in acting as a resource for Stiúrthóirí through their monthly visits, providing in-service courses, helping the establishment of new naíonraí and liaising with parents, Stiúrthóirí and An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. This group of experienced and committed early educators offers a range of skills to Stiúrthóirí in their area, and they are a vital aid in combating the professional isolation of Stiúrthóirí and in promoting high standards. It is recommended that Comhairleoirí continue to foster formal and informal peer contact between Stiúrthóirí. It is suggested that the Comhairleoir system be maintained and developed, through the provision of 'training for trainers' and opportunities for Comhairleoirí to visit and discuss naíonraí in districts other than their own, the better to implement common objectives.

- The support of parents for the work of the naíonraí is very desirable. It is suggested that An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta prepare a bilingual newsletter each term for parents, containing information on what Irish resources (friezes, books, tapes, taped-books, rhyme- and song-books, videos) are available from them and other sources, and with information about the activities and language likely to be used each term in the naíonra. Short contributions by other parents on how they use Irish in their homes would also present a model for some Irish interaction between parents and children. Such a newsletter could be distributed in batches to each naíonra, and then brought home by individual children, to minimise costs.

- It is suggested that An Comhchoiste consider commissioning 'teach yourself' Irish materials (in addition to the phrase-book already available) targeting parents who have very weak competence in Irish, with the aim of enabling parents to discuss in Irish their child's interests and activities. Classes with this as their objective might also be provided by interested Stiúrthóirí, rather than ordinary Irish classes with more generalised objectives for adults. It is further suggested that other methods of facilitating parents be considered, such as the provision of 'information packs' on particular topics, and a videotape showing parents using Irish at home with children.

- Almost a fifth of parents reported that they would like to attend Irish conversation groups. The informality of such groups might attract some parents more than classes, and would help those who had been fluent to retrieve that Irish fluency. It is recommended that An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta liaise with other Irish-language organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge, to try to promote the establishment of such groups during naíonra hours for parents who work in the home, or in the evenings for parents who work outside the home. Small groups of parents could meet either in each other's homes or in public venues where such are available. There are likely to be advantages in focusing some conversation groups on naíonra or all-Irish school parents only, giving them a common interest, and helping naíonra parents to learn about later progress in all-Irish schools.

- The preparation and dissemination of more audio-tapes of children's Irish stories and songs is urgently required to support the use of Irish at home. There is a particular lack of modestly-priced collections focused on lullabies in Irish, like the lullaby collections available in English. This is regrettable, since many parents first sing to their infants in order to lull them to sleep, and might be encouraged to introduce Irish lullabies if a tape (with booklet) were available to help them to learn them. Such support for parents in introducing even some Irish in the home from their child's earliest infancy could help to establish more positive attitudes to later Irish use with that child, in addition to providing welcome aid for those parents who have already chosen to speak Irish to their children.

- Exploration of the benefits of reaching children even younger than those in naíonraí through Parent and Toddler groups is recommended. Almost a third of naíonra parents said that they would like to attend such groups, and it is suggested that they be facilitated through the provision of detailed guidance materials about how to organise and operate such groups through Irish. It might be beneficial to build a parents' conversation group into such meetings, if a rota of parents looked after the children while the rest of the adults had a short break and a chance to speak Irish to each other.

- Consideration of ways of bringing parents and young children into contact with native speakers in the Gaeltacht is worthy of exploration, and could be encouraged from those already involved in Gaeltacht tourism. Short courses for parents either in Irish or other activities (such as pottery, hill-walking, painting) through the medium of Irish could be combined with naíonra-like activities for children, along the lines developed by Cumann an Phiarsaigh in Donegal, which also provides a number of activities in which both parents and children can participate together. Such short Gaeltacht breaks could be brought to the attention of naíonra parents through the parents' newsletter and could prove an attractive option for many. Consideration would need to be given to providing a number of scholarships to assist parents of lower means to make such

Gaeltacht visits. In general, it could be said that the recognition of the parents of children in naionrai and all-Irish schools as a significant market would improve the provision of services to them by commercial operators.

- The hours of naionra operation need to be reviewed in light of the constraints operating on parents, if some prospective naionra parents are not to be forced to select English-medium pre-schooling. It is recommended that consideration be given to extending the hours of operation of some naionrai (with consequent adaptation of the pacing of activities for children) to three and a half hours of sessional care, and/or providing an optional after-naionra service through Irish in areas where that appears to be warranted.

Na Naionrai Gaelacha

- *Na Naionrai Gaelacha* is the voluntary body of Stiúrthóiri which represents the views of Stiúrthóiri in the operation of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaiochta. It offers members a forum in which to meet and interact, as well as annual outings and events such as *Lá na Naionrai* (day of the naionrai). It is suggested that the needs expressed by Stiúrthóiri for more contact with their peers and for opportunities to visit other naionrai might be addressed directly by Na Naionrai Gaelacha. The system already in place, whereby a Stiúrthóir is selected to represent each area, might be used to establish a contact network for each locality, with some regular local meetings, as already occurs in some districts during in-service training.

- The constitution of Na Naionrai Gaelacha notes that one of their aims is to promote awareness of immersion pre-schooling in the community. It is important that all parents be made aware of the value of early Irish immersion in the naionrai, including those from lower socio-economic groups. Na Naionrai Gaelacha can play a valuable role in promoting awareness of this service among all parents and ensuring that it is not perceived to be suitable only for more advantaged groups.

- It is suggested that this organisation might discuss practical ways of involving parents more in the work of naionrai (either in the naionra itself or at home) where that is possible and appropriate. It is likely that parents need Stiúrthóiri to take the lead in initiating and delineating such involvement, rather than waiting for parents to offer such help.

- The parents reported that their attendance at the introductory meetings organised by Stiúrthóiri is quite low, and it is suggested that parents who do not attend the first meeting be offered a chance to attend a later meeting after their child has begun attending, when they might be more interested or committed. It is important that parents with very low levels of Irish be made aware that they will be welcomed and catered for in English at such meetings.

- It is suggested that Na Naionrai Gaelacha, in conjunction with Stiúrthóiri and Comhairleoiri, continue to liaise with local primary and all-Irish schools, with the aim of further promoting communication between them and ensuring a smooth transition from naíonra to the reception class.

While these are the bodies most directly involved in the naíonraí, there are other organisations such as Irish language publishers, public libraries and Bord na Gaeilge who support or contribute to their work, and some of the ways in which this contribution could be made most effective are considered below.

Other Organisations

Less than a third of Gaeltacht parents and less than a sixth of Galltacht parents reported that they read to their children in Irish regularly or often. It would be helpful to add a logo showing an adult and child reading together to the cover of young children's Irish books, to emphasise the need for parental involvement. In addition, a short preface could be added inside each cover describing strategies for reading in Irish with young children, and translation of terms used in the book, as in the Welsh series *Twm a Cadi a Fi*. A third of all parents would like help with selecting books and tapes for their naíonra child. Children's books in Irish are mainly published by An Gúm, but smaller numbers are also published by private companies such as Cló Iar-Chonnachta, An Clóchomhar and Gill and MacMillan. There is a particular difficulty with the marketing of books in Irish, since many bookshops do not carry a good range of them because of low sales, and buyers are then restricted to a handful of specialist outlets. An overall review of the problems of reaching potential buyers of Irish materials would be beneficial. At present ÁIS must advise parents to order books in Irish through their local bookshop, but such a strategy (which involves the customer seeking the product) may depress sales of books in Irish in face of the competition from the range of books in English freely on display. To order a book, parents need information on which to base their choice, and many in this study reported that lacked this information. The option of distributing catalogues (containing illustrations of books and summaries in Irish and English) to parents through the naíonraí is worth considering, in order to bring these materials directly to parents' attention.

Some publishers of children's materials in English use the agent system in Ireland to provide book displays, for example at Parent and Toddler groups or coffee mornings. These events allow parents to examine books and buy them on the spot if they wish. If similar displays of Irish books could be organised at the introductory meeting for naíonra parents, or later in the naíonra year, or at fund-raisers and social gatherings, they would be most useful for parents and Stiúrthóirí alike. It is particularly important that such small book displays would be made available to parents in the Galltacht and Gaeltacht alike, to ensure that they are fully aware of the supports for the language which are currently available. Of course it would be important that no Stiúrthóir or parent would feel under any pressure to buy in such an arrangement, but that parents who wished to could be informed of the range available, and helped to select suitable items.

It is relevant here to note that research has shown (Hickey 1991) that taped books encourage children to read L2 books significantly more often. In addition, taped books act as resources for parents who may be unsure of pronunciation or phrasing, and non-verbal cues also help with comprehension. The provision of tapes to accompany books in Irish (with a slow or moderately-paced reading of the text, appropriate sound-effects and music) is urgently required.

Parents also need to be informed of the service provided in their local libraries regarding books in Irish. It is essential that public libraries stock as wide a range of children's books in Irish as possible. It is suggested that the Children's and School's Sections of the local authority libraries liaise with An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta to establish which library branches serve areas which have a naíonra, so that branches in which there is likely to be a take-up of books in Irish for young children can be targeted. It would then be most effective if libraries could draw books in Irish to the attention of parents and children, for example, through special displays and book readings.

It should also be noted that Stiúrthóirí are entitled to request a range of suitable books in Irish from their local Branch Librarian, and they then should encourage parents to request and borrow these books regularly, thereby creating a demand to which libraries strive to respond. In addition, in areas which do not have easy access to a library, there is a system whereby an individual, such as a Stiúrthóir, can request a block loan of a large number of books for a period of 3 months. These books can be used in the naíonra and displayed to parents, to alert them to what is available, either on loan from the library or to buy.

The remit of Bord na Gaeilge is to promote the use of Irish in the community, and it would therefore appear that the effects of naíonra attendance on increasing Irish use in the home, and increasing the pool of Irish speakers among younger generations, makes this a vitally important area for support. The present study indicates a need to maintain and improve the quality of the network of existing naíonraí, in addition to promoting the establishment of new naíonraí. At present, the annual funding of the naíonraí network, through An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, is quite modest (£81,500 in 1995), when compared to funding for other Irish language activities. This level of funding may underestimate the 'ripple' effect of naíonra attendance on the families and communities of the individual children who attend. It is suggested that consideration be given to extending the subsidy provided for children attending naíonraí in the Gaeltacht to all naíonraí. This, combined with some increase in fees for naíonra parents of higher means, would facilitate greater overall provision of naíonra places, by making the terms and conditions of Stiúrthóirí more attractive, while safeguarding the equality of access to low-income children. Further resourcing of An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta would also contribute to the effectiveness of the service in maintaining standards and developing new naíonraí. Such additional investment in the naíonraí would be most helpful in contributing to the expansion of naíonra places, while allowing individual naíonraí to function most effectively and with small numbers.

There is also a need to provide practical supports for the parents of naionra children, such as materials aimed at increasing Irish use in the home. Foremost among such materials would be a regular newsletter to all naionra parents, giving them information on typical events in the naionra, the general course of second language acquisition, and ways of supporting that acquisition in the home. Bord na Gaeilge publishes a quarterly magazine entitled *An Léitheoir*, and it would be most helpful if an issue of this were regularly devoted to *An Léitheoir Óg agus a Thuismitheoirí* (perhaps in co-operation with a book club), describing the books available in Irish for young children, with some information in English and Irish on their content, as well as some reviews. Such an issue could then be distributed to parents through the naionrai.

Finally, Bord na Gaeilge has already run a pilot Parents and Toddlers scheme in Irish and it is suggested that it now consult with An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta and other groups currently operating similar schemes, with a view to developing materials which would assist interested parents, and to promoting the establishment of such groups around the country. Other materials (modelled on those available in Welsh, which aim to set realistic targets for what parents can do in Irish each week with young children and babies) could be distributed to naionra parents, many of whom also have children younger than the child in the naionra, with the intention of encouraging them to use more Irish at home with their young children or in small Parent and Toddler groups.

8.12 THE NAÍONRAÍ AND THE FUTURE

As the movement to provide Irish-medium pre-schooling approaches a new century, new demands will be placed upon it. The most immediate of these demands centre on the implementation of relevant sections of the Child Care Act 1991, from the end of 1996. The Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations require that all those involved in catering for pre-school children should notify their local health board that they are providing such a service. Health boards, in consultation with the Department of Education will be required to inspect pre-school services. New regulations regarding the requirements for premises are now in effect, particularly in relation to heating, cleanliness, fire safety, repair and maintenance, as well as equipment and facilities. A maximum ratio of 10 children to one adult has been set, but with a second adult available on the premises, and an overall maximum size of 20 children per group. These requirements will affect how naionrai are operated, and will pose particular problems for those Stiúrthóirí whose premises need to be adapted or whose intake of children needs to be modified in order to comply with the regulations. It is desirable that there be some support made available to help Stiúrthóirí to fulfil these requirements. Overall, however, since this legislation entails greater recognition of the importance of work with young children and represents an attempt to provide higher standards for their care, it is to be welcomed.

Another challenge which faces naionraí concerns the changes in Irish society since they began almost 30 years ago. The 1996 Labour Force Survey showed a sharp increase in the number of women in paid employment to 38% of the labour force. Between 1995 and

1996 the Labour Force Survey showed a drop of 47,000 women engaged in home duties. There has also been growth in the number of lone parent families. These trends are likely to continue in the immediate future and to pose a challenge for child-care provision. At present there appear to be no crèches or nurseries offering full-time Irish-medium child-care; nor do there appear to be registered after-school services provided through Irish, although both are available through English in larger towns and cities. While the demand for such services is more scattered than for English-medium services, it is possible that enough interest could be found in districts with an all-Irish school to make them viable. Regarding the naíonraí, there will be a need to consider whether parents are precluded from sending their child to a naíonra because of the difficulty of accommodating their work or other child-care requirements with the hours of operation of their local naíonra.

Naíonraí will continue to play an important role in Gaeltacht areas in the future. They are important, firstly, because they provide pre-schooling to Gaeltacht children, and secondly, because they contribute to the Irish competence of non-Irish speaking children in the Gaeltacht before they begin school. The challenge for the future will be the encouragement of the use of Irish in the home by Gaeltacht parents before and after children begin in the naíonraí. To this end there is a need to inform parents of the benefits of bilingualism, and of the various models of bilingualism (from the exclusive use of a minority language in the home, through the 'one parent one language' model to 'shared modelling' where both parents use both languages in different situations). Gaeltacht parents also need to be assured that their children will have fluent spoken and written English (the dominant language of the wider Irish community) on leaving school, and given information on the advantages of hearing Irish at home.

This survey showed that over 70% of children in Gaeltacht naíonraí had at least one parent who could take part in 'most conversations' in Irish, and there is a clear need to encourage these parents who have fluency to speak Irish to their child in the home, rather than have the entire household use only English. It would also be beneficial to promote contact with Gaeltacht parents even before their children begin attending the naíonra at age 3. Such contact might take the form of organised Parent and Toddler groups, or visits at intervals from another parent of older children, as in the 'community mother' scheme in Dublin. Such meetings would allow the encouragement of Irish use by at least one Gaeltacht parent or even partial use of Irish by one or both parents in the home from the outset. The Gaeltacht Stiúrthóirí might be well placed to organise such contacts with parents in order to promote the use of Irish in the home, provided they are given the resources and the materials needed for such an enterprise.

The discussion in Section 4.4 showed that there is a need to extend the naíonraí in the Gaeltacht in order to provide Irish-medium pre-schooling to the large proportion (about three-quarters) of three- and four-year-olds there who do not at present attend a naíonra. Meeting the needs of a rural population may require some flexibility and adaptation, for example through the provision of transport to bring children together, or adjusting the hours of operation to suit local needs. If such efforts resulted in more Gaeltacht children beginning school with higher levels of Irish competence, they would be most worthwhile.

8.13 FUTURE RESEARCH

- There is a need to define more fully the objectives of the naionrai, so that they can be evaluated objectively on an ongoing basis, by Stiúrthóirí and Comhairleoirí, according to detailed criteria. This would facilitate the provision of assistance and guidance on specific topics for Stiúrthóirí deemed not to be performing at the highest level.
- This study conducted tests on 225 children from 25 naionrai. Attempts to examine class (i.e. naionra) effects in greater detail, for example, looking at the differential effects of a range of teaching styles or strategies, would require a larger sample of naionrai and children.
- Further qualitative study of children in Gaeltacht naionrai is currently underway, in co-operation with Údarás na Gaeltachta and the European Commission. This will allow examination of the interaction patterns between the Stiúrthóir and children in Gaeltacht naíonraí of varying levels of Irish competence. This observational study will also facilitate an assessment of the methodology used and the activities which are engaged in by a sample of children in a number of Gaeltacht naionrai. Individual children experience the naionra differently, depending on a range of social, linguistic and general ability factors, as well as organisational factors, and an observational study will help to analyse the impact of these factors, and provide information on how to deal with the differing needs of those attending naionrai.
- A longitudinal study would allow an assessment of the impact of naionra attendance on children's progress and attitudes to Irish as they go through both all-Irish and ordinary schools.
- The graduates of the early naionrai are now of child-bearing age, and it would be of great interest to conduct some follow-up studies to learn about their history following the naionrai, and the cumulative effects of those experiences on their Irish attitudes and use with their own children.

8.14 CONCLUSIONS

Naionrai provide many children with a positive experience of pre-schooling, in which their general development is stimulated through play and a range of activities, and their social development is fostered through experience of a group of peers and co-operation with other children. In addition, they also acquire skills in Irish competence and production. It is important to remember that the level of Irish ability gained in the naionra is substantially greater than is found in any other type of pre-schooling currently available, and this Irish ability can only be advantageous when children proceed to primary school, whether English- or Irish-medium.

Hayes (1995) noted that children have the right to access to high quality pre-school education which is suitable to their age and needs. A bilingual state should also offer parents the option of selecting Irish-medium pre-schooling for their children if they so wish. It is desirable that immersion pre-schooling should be available to all, rather than only to those lucky enough to live near the relatively small number of existing naionrai. It must be remembered that the experience of attending a naionra affects not only the individual child, but also his or her parents and siblings, and therefore, to some extent affects language use and language attitudes in the wider community. Thus, it is important that the contribution of the naionrai be properly recognised and supported, despite the tendency in our society to under-resource activities revolving around young children

Fishman (1991), reviewing the naionrai in the context of the movement to reverse language shift, noted that children in naionrai acquire proficiency in both comprehension and production, and acquire strongly positive attitudes towards Irish. In addition, he claimed that naionrai foster positive attitudes among parents and lead to growth in the demand for and establishment of, all-Irish primary schools. This study confirms the positive association between naionra attendance and increased home use of Irish. While such increases in home use are unlikely to constitute total shifts from English to Irish in the majority of homes, they result in a more supportive environment for children's continuing Irish learning, and, in conjunction with later attendance at all-Irish schools, may influence transmission to younger siblings. This study showed that children's learning was positively influenced by hearing even some Irish at home, and parents therefore need to be encouraged to speak Irish to their children even in a small number of contexts such as book-reading, washing, or dressing. Overall, it appears that the naionrai play a very valuable role in helping to carry Irish into the home, at a time when children are happy to display their newly-learned skills and are keen to involve their parents in this new interest, and parents still feel they can make a contribution to their children's Irish learning, even when their own competence is fairly low.

Another significant result of naionra attendance is the provision to children and their parents of the style of child-centred language which is commonly missing among L2 language learners, but which every L1 speaker knows from their own childhood. A knowledge of nursery rhymes, action songs and games, and the vocabulary to discuss the feelings, interests and physical and intellectual needs of very young children is imperative in promoting intergenerational transmission, and naionrai can provide parents and children with this register which is not usually learned in the formal school system.

Crucially, what the naionrai do is bring the acquisition of Irish a step closer to the home, or to the 'intergenerational nexus' as Fishman (1991:413) describes it, since they work with very young children and encourage parental involvement in the present, and may facilitate transmission by those children in the future to their own offspring. In effect, naionrai function as a bridge between the school system and the home, by targeting children at an age when parents accept that they need to be involved in their children's educational activities, and by emphasising the importance of parents' contribution to the children's learning of Irish. It is for this reason that the naionrai can be considered to be a vital link in the chain of language revitalisation, and it is a link which will reward greater institutional and financial support in the future.

Glossary of terms

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta A joint committee composed of representatives of *Bord na Gaeilge* and *Na Naionraí Gaelacha* which co-ordinates the naionrai already established and facilitates the founding of new naionrai. It also facilitates other groups or individuals wishing to use Irish with young children. It is funded by *Bord na Gaeilge* as well as receiving administrative support from that body.

An Gúm The Irish publications branch of the Department of Education. An Gúm publishes textbooks in Irish for primary, post-primary and third-level students, as well as Irish books for children, teenagers and adults, dictionaries and reference works.

An Nuacht Broadcast news bulletins in Irish.

APL Accreditation for Prior Learning (see OMNA)

Bord na Gaeilge The State body set up in 1978 to promote the Irish language as an everyday means of communication. The Bord works closely with the state sector on the development and implementation of policies for Irish. Other work includes community development projects and book distribution. The Bord receives an annual grant-in-aid from the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht.

Comhairleoir 'Advisor'. *An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta* organises itself by districts, each of which has its own Comhairleoir who visits the naionrai in her area once a month and runs in-service courses for *Stiúrthóirí*, as well as attending parents' meetings and engaging in other liaison work.

Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge The voluntary association of teachers of Irish (including those who teach through Irish) at all levels of the educational system.

Comhdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge The Central Steering Council of the Irish language organisations. It is the forum through which Irish language organisations and community groups ensure positive action for the Irish language. The objective of Comdháil Náisiúnta na Gaeilge is to strengthen and consolidate goodwill and support for the Irish language and its usage as a living language, so that it may be used freely and widely in all aspects of Irish life.

Conradh na Gaeilge A voluntary organisation, with 250 branches in Ireland and abroad, devoted to the revival of Irish. This body was founded in 1893 and now organises a range of activities to encourage the use of Irish, such as Irish classes, *Seachtain na Gaeilge* (Irish week) and the publication of Irish materials. It also aims to assist parents who wish to set up naionrai or all-Irish schools. This body supported the setting up of the first naionrai and continues to provide support to naionrai and *Na Naionrai Gaelacha*.

Cumann an Phiarsaigh Summer Irish college in Co. Donegal which began in 1996 to offer week-long courses for families. While parents attend morning classes, babies and children under 10 accompanying their parents are offered age-appropriate care through Irish..

Cylch Ti a Fi Welsh-medium parent and child group. These groups make provision for children under three years to participate in activities through Welsh, accompanied by parents. They are supported by Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

Cylch Meithrin Welsh-medium nursery group. Such groups are run by local voluntary committees and receive financial support and advice from the parent organisation, Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin.

Gaelscoileanna National organisation for all-Irish schools. This organisation assists parents in the setting up of Irish-medium schools, and provides services such as in-service training, advice and assistance to existing schools.

Gaeltacht Areas which are officially designated as Irish-speaking. These are mainly located on the western seaboard, apart from small districts in Waterford, Cork and Meath.

Galltacht Areas in which the community language is English. This comprises most of the Republic of Ireland, including the major metropolitan areas. (*See Gaeltacht*).

Glór na nGael Organisers of a competition each year to encourage communities to promote Irish culture, and, especially, the use of Irish as a spoken language..

Grúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán Irish-medium Parent and Toddler group.

Immersion education. The use of the child's non-native language as the medium of instruction, in a context where there is strong societal support for the maintenance of the child's mother-tongue.

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann (ITÉ) (The Linguistics Institute of Ireland) ITÉ was established in 1972 as a national centre for the study of state language policy. It provides research and consultancy services to all agencies whose activities involve them with language issues. The teaching of Irish and Modern Languages in the schools is a special concern.

IPPA Irish Pre-school Playgroups Association. IPPA supports parents- and playleaders, helping them to understand and provide for the needs of young children.

Kohanga Reo 'Language nests'. Maori-medium pre-schools in New Zealand.

Naionra A naionra is an Irish-medium pre-school. The term 'pre-school' is used generally throughout the English version of this report. It is important that some of the negative connotations of this term, such as its links with formal teaching, children sitting at desks, and a traditional school atmosphere, should not be associated with the naionraí. This English term has been chosen in preference to 'play-group', which has its own set of often inaccurate associations, in order to counteract the assumption that what happens before the beginning of formal education is unimportant and is 'only play'. Ó Murchú (1979:12) noted that the term *naionra* was itself coined in order to avoid the negative connotations of *naíscoil* and *grúpa súgartha* and to indicate a blend of the most positive aspects of the ordered atmosphere of a pre-school with the freedom and self-direction of a play group

Na Mamailínigh Voluntary scheme operating in Ballinteer, Co. Dublin, which helps parents to organise into small groups of about six, so that parents, toddlers and babies can meet once a week in each other's homes, in order to play and socialise through Irish.

Na Naíonraí Gaelacha Organisation of *Stiúrthóirí* which aims to promote the establishment of *naíonraí*, foster support for Irish-medium education in the community, and educate its members regarding early immersion.

National Council for Educational Awards (NCEA) The NCEA is the state agency responsible for the co-ordination, development and promotion of technical, industrial, scientific, technological and commercial education, and education in art and design outside the universities. It gives effect to these responsibilities through the approval of courses of high standard, and the granting and conferring of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other educational awards.

National Council for Vocational Awards (NCVA) The NCVA was established to develop a national certification system for vocational training programmes at second level. The Council structures courses on a modular basis, with appropriate levels of qualification. It develops national assessment criteria and provides a certificate based on trainees' performance as assessed in accordance with those criteria.

OMNA The Dublin Institute of Technology/New Opportunities for Women Childcare Project, was set up to try to establish means of gaining a common mutually recognised system of accreditation for early childhood care and education training in Ireland. Its aims include: 1) Common accreditation; 2) APL (Accreditation for Prior Learning); 3) Flexible approaches to learning; and 4) Work experience mentors. It is based in the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Parvulari Catalan-medium kindergartens for children aged between three and five years.

Raidió na Gaeltachta Established in 1972 to provide a full radio service to Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht and outside the Gaeltacht. It includes news, current affairs, sport, music and other programmes and it has studios in the three major Gaeltacht areas.

RTÉ (Raidio Teilifís Éireann) RTÉ is the national broadcasting organisation, which provides radio and television services throughout the country, including *Raidió na Gaeltachta*.

Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir 'Assistant Leader' or 'Co-Leader'

Stiúrthóir 'Leader' *Naíonraí* personnel are called *Stiúrthóirí* to emphasise their role in steering children's learning in an informal way, rather than through formal teaching. The term 'Conductor' might best express this co-ordination of children's self-directed learning, but because that term has other connotations in English, the translation 'Leader' will be used here when required, but, in general, the Irish term *Stiúrthóir* will be retained.

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Teilifís na Gaeilge The state Irish-language T.V. channel, which began broadcasting for several hours each day in October 1996. Programmes for children make up a substantial proportion of its broadcasts.

Údarás na Gaeltachta The objectives of Údarás na Gaeltachta are to encourage the preservation and extension of the Irish language as the everyday language of the Gaeltacht communities and to establish and develop job-creating industries and services in the Gaeltacht regions. It co-operates with other Irish language bodies, including Bord na Gaeilge, An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta and Glór na nGael. Údarás na Gaeltachta provides grants to support naíonraí in the Gaeltacht, as well as assisting local youth groups and offering Irish-language courses in the Gaeltacht.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Parents

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Stiúrthóirí

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Stiúrthóirí Cúnta

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

Parents' Questionnaire

Dear Parent(s)

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann, in cooperation with An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, the umbrella body of naíonraí, is carrying out a survey of families with children attending a naíonra. We are very interested in the factors which lead parents to choose a naíonra, and the effects of this decision. We hope that you will tell us about your experience so that we can better understand how to continue improving naíonraí for both children and parents. EITHER PARENT may answer the questionnaire. We would greatly appreciate your cooperation in answering these questions.

All of your answers will be treated in the *strictest confidence* - only the research team will see your questionnaire. Naíonra staff will not see your questionnaire. Each questionnaire has a code-number, and this code-number will be used in order to ensure total confidentiality.

You may return this questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided. Alternatively, if you prefer, you may return the questionnaire sealed in its envelope to the Stiúrthóir, who will forward it unopened.

Thank you for your assistance.

Is mise, le meas

Tina Hickey

Dr. Tina Hickey
Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann

Má tá leagan Gaeilge den cheistneoir seo uait, cas an leabhrán bun os cionn, agus oscail ar leathanach 1 é.

1. **Do you live:**

in the Gaeltacht ☐ outside of the Gaeltacht ☐

2. **What language(s) were mainly spoken to this child as a baby and toddler?**

English only	☐	English and Irish	☐
Irish only	☐	Other (specify) ________	☐

3. **How much Irish do you estimate your child knew BEFORE beginning at the naíonra?** (Please tick ONE only)

none at all	☐	Irish as good as English	☐
some understanding only	☐	Irish better than English	☐
odd words/phrases	☐	Irish only	☐
able for conversation in Irish	☐		

4. **Have you noticed any change in this child's use of Irish SINCE beginning at the naíonra?** (Tick ONE only)

Decrease ☐ No change ☐ *Go to Q7* Increase ☐ *Go to Q5*

If there was a DECREASE in your child's use of Irish since starting at the naíonra, to what do you attribute it?

majority of other children in naíonra speak only English	☐
child is now more self-conscious about speaking Irish	☐
child has become aware of differences between Irish and English	☐
Stiúrthóir's Irish is very different from that used at home	☐
other ______________________	☐

Go to Q 7

5. **If there was an INCREASE, did it take the form of:** (Tick ALL that apply)

	Used Regularly	*Sometimes*
individual words	☐	☐
phrases	☐	☐
rhymes/songs/prayers	☐	☐
conversations	☐	☐

6. **If there has been an increase in the child's Irish use, to whom in the family is it directed?** (Tick ALL that apply)

parent(s)	☐	aunts/uncles/cousins	☐
brothers/sisters	☐	play with dolls/cars/other toys	☐
grandparents	☐		

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P1

P2

P3

P4_1

P4_2

P5_1

P5_2

P5_3

P5_4

P6_1 P6_2

P6_3 P6_4

P6_5

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7. **Can you remember if your child already knew any of the following BEFORE beginning at the naíonra?** (Please tick ALL that apply)

	in English	*in Irish*	
knew the names of colours	☐1	☐2	P7_1 P7_2
knew some numbers	☐3	☐4	P7_3 P7_4
knew some letters	☐5	☐6	P7_5 P7_6
knew 3 rhymes/songs	☐7	☐8	P7_7 P7_8
knew more than 3 rhymes/songs	☐9	☐10	P7_9 P7_10
could recognize own name (written)	☐11	☐12	P7_11 P7_12
could write own name	☐13	☐14	P7_13 P7_14

8. **SINCE attending the naíonra, what general changes are you most aware of in your child?** (Please tick ALL that apply)

now knows colours, shapes, some letters	☐1	P8_1
can now count to higher number than before	☐2	P8_2
now knows songs and rhymes in Irish	☐3	P8_3
Irish is significantly better	☐4	P8_4
English skills have improved	☐5	P8_5
more reluctant to speak Irish	☐6	P8_6
English skills have fallen behind for age	☐7	P8_7
Irish has disimproved	☐8	P8_8

9. **How would you describe your child NOW?** (Circle the point on the scale from 1-5 which you think is appropriate)

Behind for age		*Average for age*		*Advanced for age*	
1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	P9

10. **Who first suggested sending your child to a naíonra?** (Tick ONE only)

self	☐1	spouse	☐5	
naíonra supervisor	☐2	relatives/friends	☐6	P10
workmate/colleague	☐3	other	☐7	
neighbours with children attending	☐4			

11. **Why did you choose to send your child to a naíonra?** (Tick all that apply)

it was the only/most accessible pre-school in our area	☐1	P11_1
naíonra has good physical facilities	☐2	P11_2
naíonra leader's/particular naíonra's general reputation	☐3	P11_3
wanted child to learn Irish	☐4	P11_4
wanted to have child go to an all-Irish school later	☐5	P11_5
child is already bilingual from home	☐6	P11_6
child is already an Irish native-speaker	☐7	P11_7
strong recommendation by friend	☐8	P11_8
parent/older child attended a naíonra/an all-Irish school	☐9	P11_9
other (specify) ______________________	☐10	P11_10

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12. **If you had to decide again about sending your child to the naionra, would you:** (Please tick ONE box only)
    - do the same again, same naionra ☐1
    - choose the same naionra, but wait until child is older ☐2
    - choose another naionra ☐3 — P12
    - choose an English-speaking playgroup ☐4
    - not send child to pre-school of any kind ☐5

13. **How do you think your child feels about the naionra?** (Tick ONE only)
    - child enjoys it ☐1
    - child was initially confused, now settled ☐2 — P13
    - child is still struggling, sometimes reluctant to go ☐3
    - child is very unhappy, always reluctant to go ☐4

14. **Since your child began at the naionra, have you participated in any of the following?** (Please tick as many as apply)
    - an Irish-language class ☐1 — P14_1
    - an Irish-language social group/Irish-language organisation e.g. Conradh na Gaeilge, Glór na nGael ☐2 — P14_2
    - Irish-language social events e.g. table quiz, concert, fund-raising for naionra ☐3 — P14_3
    - other Irish cultural activities e.g. Irish music, dancing ☐4 — P14_4

15. **How would describe yourself?**
    - married/living with spouse ☐1 widowed ☐3 — P15
    - separated or divorced ☐2 lone parent ☐4

> *If you are married/living with a spouse, please answer the parts of the following questions which ask about your spouse/partner as well as about yourself.*
>
> *Otherwise, please fill in the details about yourself only.*

16. **If you live outside the Gaeltacht:**
    Have you and/or your spouse visited the Gaeltacht in the last 4 years?
    - *Self* Yes ☐1 No ☐2 — P16_1
    - *Spouse* Yes ☐1 No ☐2 — P16_2

17. **Did you or your spouse attend an introductory meeting before your child began at the naionra?**
    - *Self* Yes ☐1 No ☐2 — P17_1
    - *Spouse* Yes ☐1 No ☐2 — P17_2

18a. How often do you engage in the following activities?

	Weekly+	*Monthly+*	*Rarely*	*Never*	**Office use only**
dropping off/collecting child	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_1
checking on child's progress	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_2
using naionra books/tapes at home	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_3
discussing naionra activities with child	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_4
attending dramas/outings etc.	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_5
management/fundraising	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_6
helping in naionra	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_7

18b. If living with a spouse, how often does he/she engage in the following?

	Weekly+	*Monthly+*	*Rarely*	*Never*	
dropping off/collecting child	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_8
checking on child's progress	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_9
using naionra books/tapes at home	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_10
discussing naionra activities with child	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_11
attending dramas/outings etc	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_12
management/fundraising	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_13
helping in naionra	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P18_14

19. What language is used by you and your spouse on these occasions?

Self	Irish only ☐1	Some Irish ☐2	English only ☐3	P19_1
Spouse	Irish only ☐1	Some Irish ☐2	English only ☐3	P19_2

20. How do you feel about your level of involvement in the naionra?

too little ☐1 about right ☐2 too much ☐3 — P20_1

What prevented you from being more involved? (Tick all that apply)

insufficient Irish	☐1	P20_2
domestic/work arrangements	☐2	P20_3
feeling of not being welcome	☐3	P20_4
other (specify) ____________________	☐4	P20_5

21. Does your naionra provide any of the following, and if not, would you like any to be provided?

	Already provided		*I would like this*			
	Yes	*No*	*Yes*	*No*		
regular information on activities	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_1	P21_2
samples of phrases child learned	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_3	P21_4
copies of rhymes/songs	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_5	P21_6
help with selecting Irish books/tapes	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_7	P21_8
help on using Irish at home	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_9	P21_10
class/information on classes in Irish	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_11	P21_12
Irish conversation group for parents	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_13	P21_14
social events for parents in Irish	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_15	P21_16
a Parents and Toddlers' group	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P21_17	P21_18

					Office use only
22. Are either of the following accessible to you?					
all-Irish Primary school	Yes	☐1	No	☐2	P22_1
school with some subjects through Irish	Yes	☐1	No	☐2	P22_2
If yes, approximate distance from your home	__ miles				P22_3

23. When you enrolled your child at a naionra, did you intend to send her/him later to an all-Irish/Gaeltacht school?

Yes ☐1 No ☐2 Was considering it ☐3 P23_1

Now that your child has spent some time in a naionra, have you decided what type of school to send him/her to?

all-Irish school	☐1	English-medium school	☐3	
some subjects through Irish	☐2	still undecided	☐4	P23_2

24. For parents considering sending their child to an all-Irish primary school would you say that pre-school education through Irish is:

very important ☐1 not very important ☐2 not important at all ☐3 P24

25a. How much Irish was spoken in your OWN home and school?

Irish was spoken at home		*Primary school*		
as a rule	☐1	all-Irish/Gaeltacht	☐5	
frequently	☐2	part-Irish	☐6	P25_1 P25_2
occasionally	☐3	ordinary school	☐7	
never	☐4			
Your own parents' ability		*Post-primary school*		
both parents fluent Irish	☐8	all-Irish/Gaeltacht	☐11	
one parent fluent	☐9	part-Irish	☐12	
neither	☐10	ordinary school	☐13	P25_3 P25_4

25b. How much Irish was spoken in your spouse's home and school?

Irish was spoken at home		*Primary school*		
as a rule	☐1	all-Irish/Gaeltacht	☐5	
frequently	☐2	part-Irish	☐6	P25_5 P25_6
occasionally	☐3	ordinary school	☐7	
never	☐4			
Parents' ability		*Post-primary school*		
both parents fluent Irish	☐8	all-Irish/Gaeltacht	☐11	
one parent fluent	☐9	part-Irish	☐12	
neither	☐10	ordinary school	☐13	P25_7 P25_8

25c. What experience of Irish do you want for your children?

Irish spoken at home			*Primary school*	*Post-primary school*	
as a rule	☐1	all-Irish/Gaeltacht	☐5	☐8	P25_9
frequently	☐2	part-Irish	☐6	☐9	P25_10
occasionally	☐3	ordinary school	☐7	☐10	P25_11
never	☐4				

26. How would you assess your own and your spouse's ability in Irish:
(Tick ONE from each section only for yourself and spouse)

		Self	*Spouse*	**Office use only**	
SPEAKING	not a word	☐1	☐1		
	a few words	☐2	☐2		
	short sentences	☐3	☐3	P26_1	P26_2
	bits of conversations	☐4	☐4		
	most conversations	☐5	☐5		
	any conversation	☐6	☐6		
UNDERSTANDING	not a word	☐1	☐1		
	a few words	☐2	☐2		
	short sentences	☐3	☐3	P26_3	P26_4
	bits of conversations	☐4	☐4		
	most conversations	☐5	☐5		
	any conversation	☐6	☐6		
WRITING	not a word	☐1	☐1		
	a few words	☐2	☐2		
	short sentences	☐3	☐3	P26_5	P26_6
	a short article/letter/note	☐4	☐4		
	any document	☐5	☐5		
READING	not a word	☐1	☐1		
	a few words	☐2	☐2		
	short sentences	☐3	☐3	P26_7	P26_8
	a short article/letter/note	☐4	☐4		
	a book	☐5	☐5		

27. Before you first sent a child to the naionra, how often was Irish used between: (Please tick ONE for each line)

	Always	*Regularly*	*Sometimes*	*Never*	*Not applicable*	
self and spouse	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P27_1
self and child/ren	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P27_2
spouse and child/ren	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P27_3
children with each other	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P27_4

Go to Q. 28

Did this use of Irish consist mainly of: (Please tick ONE for each line)

	odd words	*some phrases*	*short conversations*	*all conversations*	
to spouse	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P27_5
to child(ren)	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P27_6

Office use only

28. NOW, how often is Irish used between: (Please tick ONE on each line)

	Always	*Regularly*	*Sometimes*	*Never*	*Not applicable*	
self and spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P2[illegible]_1
self and child/ren	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_2
spouse and child/ren	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_3
children with each other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_4

Go to Q. 29

Does this use of Irish consist mainly of: (Please tick ONE for each line)

	odd words	*some phrases*	*short conversations*	*all conversations*	
to spouse	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_5
to child(ren)	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_6

When and how often is Irish NOW used by either parent with child(ren):

(Tick ONE on each line)	*Always/Mostly*	*Regularly*	*Occasionally*	*Never*	
washing/dressing child	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_7
at mealtimes	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_8
helping with homework	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_9
reading/telling stories	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_10
at family prayer/church	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_11
doing housework/gardening	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_12
on journeys	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_13
while watching TV	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_14
listening to radio	☐	☐	☐	☐	P28_15

29. Do you engage in the following activities?

	Often	*Regularly*	*Sometimes*	*Never*	
watch Nuacht on TV	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_1
watch other TV programmes in Irish	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_2
listen to Raidió na Gaeltachta	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_3
listen to Irish programmes on RTE	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_4
read Irish storybooks for children	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_5
read Irish pieces in newspapers	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_6
read all-Irish newspapers/magazines	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_7
read Irish books	☐	☐	☐	☐	P29_8

30. In general then, would you say that there has been a change in the FREQUENCY of Irish use in your home since your first child began attending a naionra?

no change ☐ increase ☐ decrease ☐ — P30

31. Who now mainly looks after your child outside of naionra hours?
(Please tick ONE only)

mother/father ☐ other person ☐ — P31_1

Go to Q. 32

Is Irish ever spoken to the child by this caregiver?

Always ☐ Frequently ☐ Occasionally ☐ Never ☐ — P31_2

Office use only

32. What age was this child when s/he began attending the naionra?
less than 3 years ☐ 3 years 6 months - 4 years ☐
3 years-3 years 6 months ☐ 4 years - 4 years 6 months ☐
more than 4 years 6 months ☐

P32

33a. How many children do you have in your family? ____________________

P33_1

33b. Where does the child whose first name is on this form come in your family? (write, for example, 1 for a first child, 3 for a third) __________

P33_2

34 Do you have other children who are at present attending or have previously attended a naionra? *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐
If yes, how many? ______________________

P34_1
P34_2

35a Do you have other children who are at present attending, or have previously attended an All-Irish/Gaeltacht school? *Yes* ☐ *No* ☐
If yes, how many? ______________________

P35_1
P35_2

35b How many of your children are now in Primary school? ______________
How many of your children are now in Second Level Schools? __________

P35_3
P35_4

The following questions require some personal details. Again, these are totally confidential.

36a Are you: male ☐ female ☐

P36_1

36b What is your age now?
less than 25 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 55+ ☐
25-35 ☐ 46-54 ☐

P36_2

37 Do you live: in a city ☐ in a village ☐
in a town ☐ in the country ☐

P37

38 How would you describe yourself as regards employment?
working full-time for pay or profit ☐
working part-time for pay or profit ☐
not in paid employment ☐

P38_1

If not in paid employment, would you describe yourself as:
full-time homemaker ☐
unemployed/looking for work ☐
other (specify) ______________________ ☐

P38_2

		Office use only
39 Thinking of your present job, or your last job (if not currently in paid employment) would you describe it as: (Please tick one)		
manual (e.g. cleaner, labourer)	☐1	
semi-skilled manual (e.g. milkman, postman, machinist)	☐2	
skilled manual (e.g. bricklayer, fitter, lorry driver)	☐3	
clerical	☐4	P39
teaching	☐5	
nursing	☐6	
professional/managerial/higher civil service	☐7	
self-employed	☐8	
farmer	☐9	
40. If living with a spouse, how would you describe your spouse's present job, or his/her last job, if not presently in paid employment?		
manual (e.g. cleaner, labourer)	☐1	
semi-skilled manual (e.g. milkman, postman, machinist)	☐2	
skilled manual (e.g. bricklayer, fitter, lorry driver)	☐3	
clerical	☐4	P40
teaching	☐5	
nursing	☐6	
professional/managerial/higher civil service	☐7	
self-employed	☐8	
farmer	☐9	

41. How far did you and your spouse go in school?

	Self	*Spouse*	Office use only	
Primary school	☐1	☐1		
Group or Inter Cert	☐2	☐2		
Leaving Cert	☐3	☐3		
Third level (diploma/non-degree qualification)	☐4	☐4	P41_1	P41_2
National Teacher	☐5	☐5		
Third level (university degree)	☐6	☐6		
Master's degree or higher	☐7	☐7		
Other - specify	☐8	☐8		

Thank you for your time and effort in answering this questionnaire. We greatly appreciate your cooperation.

Please seal the questionnaire in the accompanying pre-paid envelope and post it as soon as possible.

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

Ceistneoir do na tuismitheoirí

A Thuismitheoir, a chara

Tá beartaithe ag Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann agus ag Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta suirbhé a dhéanamh ar na teaghlaigh a bhfuil páistí leo ag freastal ar naíonraí. Is é an Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta an t-eagras a thugann tacaíocht do na naíonraí uile. Is díol spéise na toscaí is bun le roghnú naíonra (seachas réamhscoil eile). Tá súil againn go roinnfidh tú do chuid taithí leo agus na torthaí a d'eascair as an gcinneadh a rinne tú chomh maith, i gcaoi go dtuigfear níos fearr cé mar is féidir feabhas a chur ar eispéireas naíonra ar mhaithe leis na páistí agus na tuismitheoirí araon. Tig le *ceachtar* den bheirt thuismitheoirí an ceistneoir a chomhlánú. Bheimis fíorbhuíoch díot as na ceisteanna atá ann a fhreagairt.

Coimeádfar na freagraí uait *faoi rún.* An lucht taighde amháin a fheicfeas na ceistneoirí. Ní fheicfidh foireann an naíonra iad. Códaíodh gach ceistneoir agus bainfear leas as an gcód seo amháin chun críche rúndachta.

Tig leat an fhoirm seo a sheoladh díreach chun na hoifige sa chlúdach réamhíochtha a fuair tú léi. Nó tig leat an clúdach a thabhairt don stiúrthóir naíonra - ní osclófar na clúdaigh ach seolfar díreach chun na hoifige i mBaile Átha Cliath iad. Is mór againn do chomhoibriú.

Is mise, le meas

Tina Hickey

Dr. Tina Hickey
Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann

If you wish to answer an English version of this questionnaire, please turn the booklet over.

Úsáid oifige

1. **An bhfuil conaí ort:**

sa Ghaeltacht ☐
taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht ☐

P1

2. **Cé na teangacha is mó a labhraíodh leis an bpáiste seo agus é/í ina naíonán?**

Béarla amháin ☐
Gaeilge amháin ☐
Gaeilge agus Béarla ☐
Teanga eile (luaigh í) _____ ☐

P2

3. **Cé mhéad Gaeilge a bhí aige/aici dar leat roimh thosú sa naíonra?**
(Cuir tic le haon cheann amháin)

Gaeilge ar bith ☐
breacthuiscint ☐
corrfhocal/ frásaí ☐
É/í in ann comhrá a dhéanamh i nGaeilge ☐
Gaeilge agus Béarla ar aon chaighdeán ☐
an Ghaeilge níos fearr ná an Beárla ☐
an Ghaeilge amháin ☐

P3

4. **An bhfuil athrú ar bith tugtha faoi deara agat in úsáid na Gaeilge ag an bpáiste ó thosaigh sé/sí sa naíonra?**

Laghdú ☐
Gan athrú ☐ *Téigh chuig C7*
Méadú ☐ *Téigh chuig C5*

P4_1

Más LAGHDÚ in úsáid na Gaeilge ag do pháiste a tharla, céard ba chúis leis dar leat?

Béarla amháin ag mórchuid na bpáistí eile sa naíonra ☐
an páiste a bheith níos cúthaili anois agus é/í ag labhairt Gaeilge ☐
tuiscint níos fearr a bheith ag an bpáiste ar na difríochtaí idir an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla ☐
Gaeilge an Stiúirthóra a bheith an-éagsúil leis an nGaeilge sa bhaile ☐
Cúis eile ______________________ ☐

Téigh chuig C7

P4_2

5. **Más MÉADÚ a tharla, an mar seo a leanas a tharla sé?** (Cuir tic i ngach áit a oireann)

	Go rialta	*Uaireanta*	
Focail aonair	☐	☐	P5_1
frásaí	☐	☐	P5_2
rainn/amhráin/paidreacha	☐	☐	P5_3
comhrá	☐	☐	P5_4

6. **Más méadú a tharla, cé leis a tharla sé sa teaghlach?**
(Cuir tic i ngach áit a oireann)

tuismitheoir(í) ☐
deartháireacha/deirfúiracha ☐
seanathair/seanmháthair ☐
aintíní/uncailí/colceathracha ☐
ag súgradh le bábóga/ carranna/bréagáin eile ☐

P6_1 P6-2
P6_3 P6_4
P6_5

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Úsáid oifige

7. **Raibh ar chumas do pháiste a bhfuil thíos a dhéanamh, SULAR thosaigh sé/sí sa naíonra?** (Cuir tic i ngach bosca a oireann)

	i mBéarla	*i nGaeilge*	Úsáid oifige
dathanna a ainmniú	☐	☐	P7_1 P7_2
roinnt uimhreacha a aithint	☐	☐	P7_3 P7_4
roinnt litreacha a aithint	☐	☐	P7_5 P7_6
3 rainn/amhráin a rá	☐	☐	P7_7 P7_8
níos mó ná 3 rainn/amhráin a rá	☐	☐	P7_9 P7_10
a (h)ainm féin a aithint (scríofa)	☐	☐	P7_11 P7_12
a (h)ainm féin a scríobh	☐	☐	P7_13 P7_14

8. **Cé na hathruithe a thugann tú faoi deara i do pháiste ó thosaigh sé/sí sa naíonra?** (Cuir tic i ngach bosca a oireann)

aithníonn dathanna, fíoracha, roinnt litreacha	☐	P8_1
in ann comhaireamh go dtí uimhir níos airde ná roimhe seo	☐	P8_2
amhráin/rainn as Gaeilge aige/aici anois	☐	P8_3
feabhas ar a c(h)uid Gaeilge	☐	P8_4
scileanna Béarla níos fearr	☐	P8_5
leisce air(uirthi) Gaeilge a labhairt thar mar a bhíodh	☐	P8_6
scileanna Béarla ar gcúl ó thaobh aoise	☐	P8_7
Gaeilge chun deiridh	☐	P8_8

9. **Cuir síos ar do pháiste mar atá sé/sí ANOIS.** (Ciorclaigh an uimhir chuí ar an scála 1-5 thíos) P9

Ar gcúl ó thaobh aoise		*Meánach*		*Chun tosaigh ó thaobh aoise*
1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*

10. **Cé ba thúisce a mhol duit do pháiste a chur ar naíonra?** (Cuir tic amháin) P10

tú féin	☐	céile	☐
stiúrthóir naíonra	☐	gaolta/cairde	☐
comhoibrí/comhghlacaí	☐	daoine eile _____	☐
comharsana a bhfuil páistí leo ar naíonra	☐		

11. **Cad chuige ar chinn tú ar do pháiste a chur ar naíonra?** (Cuir tic sna boscaí cuí)

Ní raibh de réamhscoil sa cheantar ach é	☐	P11_1
Tá saoráidí fisiciúla an naíonra go maith	☐	P11_2
Dea-cháil an stiúirthóra/nó an naíonra féin	☐	P11_3
Theastaigh uaim go mbeadh Gaeilge ag an bpáiste	☐	P11_4
Theastaigh uaim an páiste a chur ag scoil lán-Ghaeilge ar ball	☐	P11_5
Tá an páiste dátheangach sa bhaile	☐	P11_6
Is cainteoir dúchais an páiste	☐	P11_7
Moladh láidir ó chara	☐	P11_8
D'fhreastal tuismitheoir ar naíonra/scoil lán-Ghaeilge	☐	P11_9
Cúiseanna eile (tabhair sonraí) ________________________	☐	P11_10

Úsáid oifige

12. **Dá mbeadh ort an cinneadh faoin naionra a dhéanamh aris, cad a dheanfá?** (Cuir tic i mbosca amháin) P12

an rud céanna aris, sa naionra céanna ☐
Roghnoinn an naionra céanna, ach d'fhanfainn go mbeadh an páiste níba shine ☐
Roghnoinn naionra eile ☐
Roghnoinn naionra Béarla ☐
Ní chuirfinn an páiste chuig réamhscoil ar bith ☐

13. **Cé mar a bhraitheann do pháiste é/í féin sa naionra?** (Tic amháin) P13

taitníonn sé leis/léi ☐
mearbhall ar dtús air/uirthi, ach tá sé/sí ar a s(h)uimhneas anois ☐
tá sé/sí ag streachailt leis/léi go fóill, bíonn leisce air/uirthi dul ann uaireannta ☐
tá sé/sí an-mhíshona - leisce air/uirthi dul ann i gcónaí ☐

14. **Ó thosaigh do pháiste sa naionra, an raibh tú páirteach sna gníomhaíochtaí seo?** (Cuir tic i ngach bosca a oireann)

rang Gaeilge ☐ P14_1
grúpa sóisialta Gaeilge/eagras Gaeilge,m sh Conradh na Gaeilge, Glór na nGael ☐ P14_2
ócáidí sóisialta trí Ghaeilge, quizanna boird, coirmcheoil, bailiú airgid don naionra ☐ P14_3
gníomhaíocht chultúrtha eile, m sh ceol Gaelach, damhsa ☐ P14_4

16. **An bhfuil tú?** P15

pósta/in aontíos le páirtnéir	☐	i do bhaintreach	☐
scartha/colscartha	☐	i do thuismitheoir singil	☐

> *Más pósta nó in aontíos le páirtnéir atá tú, bheimis buíoch díot ach na ceisteanna a bhaineann leat féin agus le do chéile a fhreagairt.*
>
> *In aon chás eile, tabhair sonraí fút féin amháin.*

16. **Má tá cónaí ort taobh amuigh den Ghaeltacht: Ar thug tú féin nó do chéile cuairt ar an nGaeltacht le ceithre bliana anuas?**

	Thug	*Níor thug*	
mé féin	☐	☐	P16_1
céile	☐	☐	P16_2

17. **Ar fhreastail tú féin nó do chéile ar réamhchruinniú eolais sular thosaigh do pháiste sa naionra?**

	D'fhreastail	*Níor fhreastail*	
mé féin	☐	☐	P17_1
céile	☐	☐	P17_2

18a. Cé chomh minic 's a dhéanann tú na rudaí seo a leanas?

	seachtainiúil+	*míosúil+*	*go hannamh*	*riamh*	**Úsáid oifige**
an páiste a fhágáil sa naíonra agus a bhailiú	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_1
dul chun cinn an pháiste a chinntiú	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_2
leabhair/téipeanna naíonra a úsáid sa bhaile	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_3
imeachtaí naíonra a phlé leis an bpáiste	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_4
dul chuig drámaí nó ar thurais naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_5
bainistíocht/bailiú airgid don naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_6
cabhrú sa naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_7

18b. Más pósta/in aontíos le páirtnéir atá tú, cé chomh minic 's a dhéanann seisean/sise na rudaí seo a leanas?

	seachtainiúil+	*míosúil+*	*go hannamh*	*riamh*	
an páiste a fhágáil sa naíonra agus a bhailiú	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_8
dul chun cinn an pháiste a chinntiú	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_9
leabhair/téipeanna naíonra a úsáid sa bhaile	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_10
imeachtaí naíonra a phlé leis an bpáiste	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_11
dul chuig drámaí nó ar thurais naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_12
bainistíocht/bailiú airgid don naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_13
cabhrú sa naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P18_14

19. Cén teanga a labhraíonn tú féin is do chéile ar na hócáidí seo?

Mé féin	Gaeilge amháin ☐ 1	roinnt Gaeilge ☐ 2	Béarla amháin ☐ 3	P19_1
Céile	Gaeilge amháin ☐ 1	roinnt Gaeilge ☐ 2	Béarla amháin ☐ 3	P19_2

20. Céard do bharúil ar an mbaint atá agat leis an naíonra?

gan dóthain agat ☐ 1 ceart ☐ 2 iomarcach ☐ 3 P20_1

Céard a chuir cosc ort baint níos mó a bheith agat leis?
(Cuir tic i ngach bosca a oireann)

easpa Gaeilge	☐ 1	P20_2
socruithe tí/obair	☐ 2	P20_3
gan fáilte romhat dar leat	☐ 3	P20_4
cúiseanna eile ______________	☐ 4	P20_5

21. Inis dúinn an bhfuil na gníomhaíochtaí seo ar fáil cheana i do naíonrasa agus muna bhfuil, ar mhaith leat iad a bheith ar fáil? (Cuir tic i ngach bosca a oireann)

	Curtha ar fáil		*Ba*	*Níor*		
	Tá	*Níl*	*mhaith*	*mhaith*		
breis eolais ar ghníomhaíocht an naíonra	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_1	P21_2
samplaí de na frásaí a fhoghlaimíonn an páiste	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_3	P21_4
cóipeanna de na rainn/amhráin	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_5	P21_6
cabhair chun leabhair/téipeanna a roghnú	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_7	P21_8
cabhair chun Gaeilge a úsáid sa bhaile	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_9	P21_10
rang/eolas a sholáthar faoi ranganna Gaeilge	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_11	P21_12
imeachtaí sóisialta as Gaeilge do thuismitheoirí	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_13	P21_14
eagrú grúpaí 'Tuismitheoirí agus Naíonán'	☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	P21_15	P21_16
					P21_17	P21_18

Úsáid oifige

22. An bhfuil scoil díobh seo in aice leat?

scoil Lán-Ghaeilge	Tá	☐	Nil	☐	P22_1
scoil a mhúineann roinnt ábhar trí Ghaeilge	Tá	☐	Nil	☐	P22_2

Má tá, cén t-achar atá sí ón mbaile? _______ **mile.** P22_3

23. Nuair a chuir tú do pháiste ar rolla an naíonra, an raibh fút é/í a chur chuig scoil lán-Ghaeilge ar ball?

Bhí ☐ Ní raibh ☐ Ag smaoineamh air ☐ P23_1

Anois go bhfuil tréimhse caite ag an bpáiste i naíonra, an bhfuil cinneadh déanta agat maidir leis an gcineál scoile ag a gcuirfidh tú é/í?

scoil lán-Ghaeilge	☐	scoil Bhéarla	☐	P23_2
scoil a mhúineann roinnt ábhar trí Ghaeilge	☐	nil mé cinnte fós	☐	

24. Cad é do thuairim faoin réamhscolaíocht trí Ghaeilge (naíonra) dóibh siúd atá ag smaoineamh ar pháistí leo a chur chuig bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge? Tá sé:

an-tábhachtach ☐ nil sé an-tábhachtach ☐ gan tábhacht ar bith ☐ P24

25a. Cé mhéad Gaeilge a labhraíodh in do theachsa agus ar scoil?

Labhraíodh Gaeilge sa bhaile		*Sa bhunscoil*		
de ghnáth	☐	lán-Ghaeilge/Ghaeltachta	☐	
go minic	☐	bhreac-Ghaeilge	☐	P25_1 P25_2
anois is aris	☐	gnáthscoil	☐	
nior labhraíodh riamh	☐			
Cumas do thuismitheoiri		*Iar-bhunscoil*		
liofacht ag an mbeirt acu	☐	lán-Ghaeilge/Ghaeltachta	☐	
liofacht ag duine amháin	☐	bhreac-Ghaeilge	☐	P25_3 P25_4
gan liofacht ag ceachtar acu	☐	gnáthscoil	☐	

25b. Cé mhéad Gaeilge a labhraíodh tigh do chéile agus ar scoil?

Labhraíodh Gaeilge sa bhaile		*Bunscoil*		
de ghnáth	☐	lán-Ghaeilge/Ghaeltachta	☐	
go minic	☐	bhreac-Ghaeilge	☐	P25_5 P25_6
anois is aris	☐	gnáthscoil	☐	
nior labhraíodh riamh	☐			
Cumas na dtuismitheoiri		*Iar-bhunscoil*		
liofacht ag an mbeirt acu	☐	lán-Ghaeilge/Ghaeltachta	☐	
liofacht ag duine amháin	☐	bhreac-Ghaeilge	☐	P25_7 P25_8
gan liofacht ag ceachtar acu	☐	gnáthscoil	☐	

25c. Céard ba mhian leat do do chlann?

Gaeilge á labhairt sa bhaile			*Bunscoil*	*Iar-bhunscoil*	
de ghnáth	☐	lán-Ghaeilge/			
go minic	☐	Ghaeltachta	☐	☐	P25_9
anois is aris	☐	bhreac-Ghaeilge	☐	☐	P25_10
gan aon Ghaeilge	☐	gnáthscoil	☐	☐	P25_11

Úsáid Oifige

26. Cén saghas cumais atá agat féin agus ag do pháirtnéir sa Ghaeilge dar leat? (Tic amháin i ngach rannóg duit fhéin agus do chéile)

		Mé féin	*Céile*	
LABHAIRT	gan focal ar bith	☐	☐	
	cúpla focal	☐	☐	
	abairtí gearra	☐	☐	P26_1 P26_2
	píosaí comhrá	☐	☐	
	formhór na gcomhráiti	☐	☐	
	comhrá ar bith	☐	☐	
TUISCINT	gan focal ar bith	☐	☐	
	cúpla focal	☐	☐	
	abairtí gearra	☐	☐	P26_3 P26_4
	píosaí comhrá	☐	☐	
	formhór na gcomhráiti	☐	☐	
	comhrá ar bith	☐	☐	
SCRÍOBH	gan focal ar bith	☐	☐	
	cúpla focal	☐	☐	
	abairtí gearra	☐	☐	P26_5 P26_6
	alt gearr/litir/nóta	☐	☐	
	doiciméad ar bith	☐	☐	
LÉAMH	gan focal ar bith	☐	☐	
	cúpla focal	☐	☐	P26_7 P26_8
	abairtí gearra	☐	☐	
	alt gearr/litir/nóta	☐	☐	
	leabhar ar bith	☐	☐	

27. Cé chomh minic a labhair tú Gaeilge sa bhaile sular chuir tú páiste chuig naíonra ar dtús? (Cuir tic amháin i ngach líne a oireann)

	I gcónaí	*Go rialta*	*Uaireanta*	*Riamh*	*Ní bhaineann le hábhar*	
Le do chéile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_1
Leis na páistí	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_2
Do chéile agus na páistí	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_3
Na páistí lena chéile	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_4

Téigh chuig C.28

An mar seo thíos a úsáidíodh an Ghaeilge? (Cuir tic amháin ar gach líne)

	Corrfhocal	*Roinnt frásaí*	*Comhrá gairid*	*Gach comhrá*	
Le do chéile	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_5
Le do pháistí	☐	☐	☐	☐	P27_6

28. Cé chomh minic a labhraítear Gaeilge ANOIS, idir: (Tic amháin ar gach líne)

	I gcónaí	*Go rialta*	*Uaireanta*	*Riamh*	*Ní labhraíonn riamh*	**Úsáid Oifige**
tú féin agus do chéile	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P28_1
tú féin agus do pháistí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P28_2
céile agus páistí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P28_3
na páistí eatarthu féin	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	P28_4

Téigh chuig C.29

An mar seo thíos a úsáidtear an Ghaeilge sa bhaile ANOIS?

(Cuir tic amháin ar gach líne)	*Corrfhocal*	*Roinnt frásaí*	*Comhrá gairid*	*Gach comhrá*	
Le do chéile	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_5
Le do pháistí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_6

Cén uair agus cé chomh minic a labhraíonn ceachtar den bheirt tuismitheoirí Gaeilge leis an/na páistí? (Tic amháin ar gach líne)

	I gcónaí	*Go rialta*	*Uaireanta*	*Riamh*	
ag ní/gléasadh an pháiste	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_7
le linn béilí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_8
ag cabhrú le hobair bhaile	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_9
ag léamh/insint scéalta don pháiste	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_10
le linn urnaí sa bhaile/séipéal	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_11
i mbun obair tí/garraidóireachta	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_12
ar thuras	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_13
ag breathnú ar an teilifís	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_14
ag éisteacht leis an raidió	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P28_15

29. An mbíonn tú ag gabháil de na gníomhaíochta seo a leanas?

	Go minic	*Go rialta*	*Uaireanta*	*Ní bhíonn*	
breathnú ar nuacht ar teilifís	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_1
cláir theilifíse eile as Gaeilge	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_2
éisteacht le Raidió na Gaeltachta	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_3
éisteacht le cláir Ghaeilge RTÉ	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_4
scéalta Gaeilge a léamh do pháistí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_5
ailt Ghaeilge sna nuachtáin	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_6
nuachtáin/irisí Gaeilge a léamh	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_7
leabhair Ghaeilge a léamh	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	P29_8

30. An dóigh leat go bhfuil athrú i minicíocht úsáid na Gaeilge sa teaghlach ó thosaigh an chéad pháiste leat sa naíonra?

gan athrú ☐1 méadú ☐2 laghdú ☐3 — P30

31. Cé is mó a thugann aire don pháiste seo taobh amuigh d'uaireanta naíonra? (Tic amháin)

máthair/athair ☐1 ball eile ☐2 — P31_1

Téigh chuig C.32

An labhraíonn an cúramóir seo Gaeilge riamh leis an bpáiste?

I gcónaí ☐1 Go minic ☐2 Corruair ☐3 Ní labhraíonn riamh ☐4 — P31_2

Úsáid Oifige

32. Cén aois a bhí ag an leanbh seo agus é/i ag tosú sa naíonra?
faoi bhun 3 bliana ☐1 3 bliana, 6 mhí - 4 bliana ☐3
3 bliana - 3 bliana, 6 mhí ☐2 4 bliana - 4 bliana 6 mhí ☐4
níos mó ná 4 bliana 6 mhí ☐5
P32

33a. Cé mhéad páistí atá agat? ____________________
P33_1

33b. An páiste a bhfuil a (h)ainm baiste ar an bhfoirm seo, cén t-ord inár rugadh é/í? (scríobh 1 don chéad duine, 3 don tríú duine) ____________
P33_2

34. An bhfuil páistí eile leat sa naíonra nó a bhí ann roimhe seo?
Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2
P34_1
Má tá, cé mhéad? ____________________
P34_2

35a. An bhfuil páistí eile leat ar scoil lán-Ghaeilge/scoil Ghaeltachta nó a bhí ar scoil lán-Ghaeilge scoil Ghaeltachta roimhe seo?
Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2
P35_1
Má tá, cé mhéad? ____________________
P35_2

35b. Cé mhéad den chlann atá sa bhunscoil anois? ______________
P35_3
Cé mhéad den chlann atá i scoileanna dara leibhéil? __________
P35_4

Éilíonn na ceisteanna seo a leanas sonraí pearsanta uait.
Coinneofar faoi rún iad.

36a. An Fear ☐1 nó Bean ☐2 **thú?**
P36_1

36b. Cén aois thú anois?
Faoi bhun 25 ☐1 36 - 45 ☐3 55+ ☐5
25 - 35 ☐2 46 - 54 ☐4
P36_2

37. An bhfuil cónaí ort? i gcathair ☐1 i sráidbhaile ☐3
i mbaile ☐2 faoin tuath ☐4
P37

38. Cé mar atá cúrsaí fostaíochta agat? An bhfuil tú
ag obair go lánaimseartha ☐1
ag obair go páirtaimseartha ☐2
gan obair ar thuarastal ☐3
P38_1

Mura bhfuil tú ag obair ar thuarastal, an bhfuil tú:
i mbun tí go lánaimsearta ☐1
dífhostaithe/ar thóir oibre ☐2
eile ____________________ ☐3
P38_2

Úsáid Oifige

39. **Déan cur síos ar an bpost atá anois agat nó ar an bpost is deireanaí a bhí agat mura bhfuil tú ag saothrú airgid faoi láthair:**

obair láimhe (e.g. glantóir, saothraí) ☐1
obair láimhe leathoilte (e.g. fear a'phoist, meaisíneoir) ☐2
obair oilte (e.g. briceadóir, feisteoir, tiománaí leoraí) ☐3
cléireachas ☐4
teagasc ☐5
banaltracht ☐6
gairmúil/bainisteoireacht/státseirbhís ardghráid ☐7
féinfhostaithe ☐8
feirmeoir ☐9

P39

40. **Más in aontíos le céile atá tú, déan cur síos ar an bpost atá anois aige/aici, nó a bhí aige/aice muna bhfuil sé/sí ag saothrú airgid faoi láthair?**

obair láimhe (e.g. glantóir, saothraí) ☐1
obair láimhe leathoilte (e.g. fear a'phoist, meaisíneoir) ☐2
obair oilte (e.g. briceadóir, feisteoir, tiománaí leoraí) ☐3
cléireachas ☐4
teagasc ☐5
banaltracht ☐6
gairmúil/bainisteoireacht/státseirbhís ardghráid ☐7
féinfhostaithe ☐8
feirmeoir ☐9

P40

41. **Cén leibhéal oideachais a bhain tú fhéin agus do chéile amach?**

	Mé féin	*Céile*
Bunscoil	☐1	☐1
Teastas grúpa/Idirmheánach	☐2	☐2
Ardteist	☐3	☐3
Tríú leibhéal (dioplóma - cailíocht nach céim í)	☐4	☐4
Múinteoir Náisiúnta	☐5	☐5
Tríú leibhéal (céim ollscoile)	☐6	☐6
Céim mháistir nóá níos airde	☐7	☐7
Cáilíochtaí eile	☐8	☐8

P41-1 P41_2

Gabh ár mbuíochas as am agus dua a chaitheamh leis an gceistneoir seo.

Bhéimid buíoch díot as é a sheoladh ar ais chomh luath agus is féidir sa chlúdach réamhíoctha a fuair tú.

ID1 Cód an naíonra
ID2 Ainm an naíonra

Tá gach eolas ar an gceistneoir seo faoi rún

Úsáid Oifige
S0

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

Ceistneoir don Stiúrthóir

1 **Dáta bunaithe an naíonra:** 19 __ __ S1

2. **Cá bhfuil an naíonra lonnaithe?** S2
teach príobháideach ☐1 halla/aonad poiblí ☐2
scoil ☐3 eile ☐4

3 **An gá an trealamh a bhaint anuas?** *(Cuir tic le ceann amháin)* S3
gach lá ☐1 gach dara lá+ ☐2
uair sa tseachtain ☐3 ní gá ☐4

4 **An bhfuil Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir agat?** S4
Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2

Má tá, iarr uirthi an ceistneoir cuí (agus dath gorm air) a líonadh isteach.

5. **Cé mhéid taithí atá agat mar stiúrthóir naíonra?** __________ bliana S5

6. **Cad iad na cáilíochtaí atá agat?** *(Cuir tic le gach ceann atá oiriúnach)*
tuismitheoir ☐1 bunmhúinteoir ☐2 S6.1 S6.2
tuismitheoir a thóg páiste le Gaeilge ☐3 iarbhunmhúinteoir ☐4 S6.3 S6.4
ardteist ☐5 Montessori/Froebel ☐6 S6.5 S6.6
cúrsa oiliúna an Chomhchoiste ☐7 tríú leibhéal ☐8 S6.7 S6.8
cúrsaí eile *(tabhair sonraí)* ______________________ ☐9 S6.9

7. **Conas a chuirfeá síos ar do chumas sa Ghaeilge?** *(Cuir tic le ceann amháin)* S7
ag dul i bhfeabhas ☐1 cumas sásúil ☐2
cumas maith ☐3 chomh líofa le cainteoir dúchais ☐4
cainteoir dúchais (Gaeilge ón gcliabhán agat) ☐5

8. **An úsáideann tú Gaeilge sa bhaile?** *(Cuir tic le ceann amháin)* S8
ó am go ham ☐1 uaireanta ☐2
go minic ☐3 i gcónaí ☐4

9. **Cé chomh minic is a fhreastalaíonn tú ar na cúrsaí inseirbhíse atá ar fáil?** S9
ní fhreastalaím ☐1 go hannamh ☐2
go minic/gach cúpla uair ☐3 i gcónaí/gach uair ☐4

10. **Ar mhaith leat freastal ar chúrsaí inseirbhíse ar na hábhair seo a leanas?***(Cuir tic le na cinn atá ag teastáil uait)*

an tsiceolaiocht	☐1	na healaiona (péintéireacht, úsáid cré *srl*)	☐2	cúrsaí sláinte	☐3	S10_1
sealbhú an dara teanga	☐4	pleanáil oibre sa naionra	☐5	obair láimhe	☐6	⋮
drámaíocht & puipéid	☐7	úsáid ceoil, rannta & téipeanna	☐8	eile ________	☐9	S10_9

11. **Cén chabhair is mó atá ag teastáil uait, dar leat?** *(Cuir tic le na cinn* ***is mó*** *atá ag teastáil uait)*

breis teagmhála leis na tuismitheoirí	☐1	tacaíocht ó na tuismitheoirí	☐2	S11_1
am chun freastal ar na cursaí atá ar fáil	☐3	cúrsaí nua	☐4	⋮
cúrsa Gaeilge duit féin/ dod stiúrthóir cúnta	☐5	trealamh nua	☐6	
cúrsa Gaeilge do na tuismitheoirí	☐7	breis teagmhála leis an gComhairleoir	☐8	
breis teagmhála le stiúrthóirí eile	☐9	seans cuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile	☐10	⋮
breis teagmhála le scoil lán-Gaeilge sa cheantar	☐11	aitheantas ón scoil lán-Gaeilge sa cheantar	☐12	
aitheantas ón scoil náisiúnta sa cheantar	☐13			S11_13

12. **Cé chomh minic is a dhéanann** ***an páiste ar an meán*** **na gníomhaíochtaí seo i do naíonra** ***sa téarma deireanach*?** *(Cuir tic amháin ar GACH líne)*

	gach lá	*cúpla uair sa tseachtain*	*uair amháin sa tseachtain*	*níos lú ná uair sa tseachtain*	*ní dhéanann*	
uisce	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	S12_1
gaineamh	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	⋮
péintéireacht	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
cailc & criáin	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
cré	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
taos	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
úsáid siosúir	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
brící agus ábhar tógála	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
míreanna mearaí	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
cártaí meaitseála	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
cúinne baile	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
am scéalaíochta	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
rainn & ceol	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
drámaíocht	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	
puipéid	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
cluichí grúpa	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	⋮
súgradh taobh amuigh	☐1	☐2	☐3	☐4	☐5	
aclaíocht	☐6	☐7	☐8	☐9	☐10	S12_18

13. **Roghnaigh na CÚIG gníomhaíochtaí is éifeachtaí duitse chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn.**
(Cuir tic le cúig boscaí ar a mhéad)

uisce	☐1	gaineamh	☐2	péintéireacht	☐3	S13_1
cailc & criáin	☐4	cré	☐5	taos	☐6	S13_2
úsáid siosúir	☐7	brící agus ábhar tógála	☐8	míreanna mearaí	☐9	S13_3
cártaí meaitseála	☐10	cúinne baile	☐11	am scéalaíochta	☐12	S13_4
rainn & ceol	☐13	drámaíocht	☐14	puipéid	☐15	S13_5
cluichí grúpa	☐16	súgradh taobh amuigh	☐17	aclaíocht	☐18	

14 **An mbíonn rolla á choimeád agat?** bíonn ☐1 ni bhionn ☐2 S14

15. **An mbíonn siad seo a leanas agat?**

plean oibre don bhliain bíonn ☐1 ni bhionn ☐2 S15.1

plean oibre don téarma bíonn ☐3 ni bhionn ☐4 S15.2

plean oibre don tseachtain bíonn ☐5 ni bhionn ☐6 S15.3

16. **An mbíonn téama na seachtaine in úsáid agat?** *(Cuir tic le bosca amháin)* S16

bíonn, i gcónai ☐1 bíonn, de ghnáth ☐2

bíonn, ó am go ham ☐3 ní bhionn ☐4

17. **An mbíonn pointe na maidine agat?** *(Cuir tic le bosca amháin)* S17

bíonn, i gcónai ☐1 bíonn, de ghnáth ☐2

bíonn, ó am go ham ☐3 ní bhionn ☐4

18. **Cé chomh minic is a labhraionn tú le tuismitheoir an ghnáthpháiste?** *(Cuir tic le bosca amháin)* S18

uair sa téarma ☐1 uair sa mhí ☐2

gach coicís ☐3 uair sa tseachtain ☐4 níos minicí ☐5

19. **Cén dearcadh atá agat maidir leis na tuismitheoirí?** *(Cuir tic in aice le gach tuairim lena n-aontaionn tú.)*

'Má tá tuismitheoir sásta cabhrú sa naíonra uaireanta, cuirim fáilte roimpi' ☐1 S19.1

'Ba mhaith liom iad a mhealladh isteach níos minicí' ☐2 S19.2

'B'fhearr liom iad a choimeád lasmuigh den naíonra' ☐3

'Ba mhaith liom grúpa sóisialta a bhunú dóibh' ☐4

'Spreagaim iad chun cúrsa Ghaeilge a dhéanamh' ☐5

'Ba mhaith liom dá mbéidís níos gníomhaí ag bailiú airgid don naíonra' ☐6

Eile____ ☐7 S19.7

20. **An bhfuil grúpa sóisialta ar siúl i measc na dtuismitheoirí?** Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2 S20.1

Má tá, cé chomh minic is a bhuaileann siad le chéile? S20.2

uair sa bhliain ☐1 uair sa téarma ☐2

uair sa mhí ☐3 níos minicí ná uair sa mhí ☐4

21. **An bhfuil grúpa 'Tuismitheoirí & leanbh'** *('parents & toddlers')* **ar siúl agat?**

Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2 S21.1

Muna bhfuil, ar mhaith leat ceann a thosú? Ba mhaith ☐1 Níor mhaith ☐2 S21.2

22. **An bhfuil páiste/páistí le máchail sa naíonra i mbliana?**

Tá ☐1 Níl ☐2 S22.1

Má tá, cé mhéid páistí a bhfuil máchail orthu atá ann? ______ S22.2

Cén sórt máchaile atá air/orthu? ____________________ S22.3

23. **An bhfuil bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge sa cheantar?** Tá ☐$_1$ Níl ☐$_2$ *(téigh chuig ceist 24)* S23.1

Má tá, an bhfuil tú sásta leis an teagmháil atá agat léi?
an-sásta ☐$_1$ sásta ☐$_2$ mí-shásta ☐$_3$ an-mhíshásta ☐$_4$ S23.2

Cén sórt teagmhála atá agat leis an scoil lán-Ghaeilge? S23.3
tá an naíonra ceangailte leis an scoil lán-Ghaeilge ☐$_1$
bíonn teagmháil idir an naíonra agus an scoil go rialta ☐$_2$
tugann páistí an naíonra cuairt ar an scoil gach bliain ☐$_3$
níl mórán teagmhála leis an scoil ☐$_4$
níl aon teagmháil leis an scoil ☐$_5$

24. **An bhfuil tú sásta leis an teagmháil atá agat leis an scoil náisiúnta sa cheantar?**
an-sásta ☐$_1$ sásta ☐$_2$ mí-shásta ☐$_3$ an-mhíshásta ☐$_4$ S24.1

Cén sórt teagmhála atá agat leis an scoil náisiúnta sa cheantar? S24.2
bíonn teagmháil idir an naíonra agus an scoil go rialta ☐$_1$
tugann páistí an naíonra cuairt ar an scoil gach bliain ☐$_2$
níl mórán teagmhála leis an scoil ☐$_3$
níl aon teagmháil leis an scoil ☐$_4$

25. **An bhfuil naíonra eile sa cheantar?** Tá ☐$_1$ Níl ☐$_2$ S25

26. **An bhfuil Grúpa Súgartha Béarla sa cheantar?** Tá ☐$_1$ Níl ☐$_2$ S26

Má tá, an bhfuil teagmháil agat leis/leo?

	Tá	*Níl*	
Naíonra eile	☐$_1$	☐$_2$	S26.1
Grúpa Súgartha Béarla	☐$_3$	☐$_4$	S26.2

Má tá, an bhfuil tú sásta leis an teagmháil atá agat leis an naíonra?
an-sásta ☐$_1$ sásta ☐$_2$ mí-shásta ☐$_3$ an-mhíshásta ☐$_4$ S26.3

Má tá, an bhfuil tú sásta leis an teagmháil atá agat leis an nGrúpa Súgartha?
an-sásta ☐$_1$ sásta ☐$_2$ mí-shásta ☐$_3$ an-mhíshásta ☐$_4$ S26.4

27. **An bhfuil cúnamh de shaghas ar bith ar fáil ag an naíonra ó aon Eagras?** Tá ☐$_1$ Níl ☐$_2$ S27.1

Má tá, cén t-eagra(i)s	**Cén cúnamh?**
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________
______________________	______________________

28. **Cén táille atá ar an naíonra?**
táille théarma £____ táille mhíosa £____ S28.1 S28.2
táille seachtaine £____ táille lae £____ S28.3 S28.4

Táimid buíoch díot as ucht do chomhoibriú

Úsáid Oifige

Cód.Nra.

Ainm.Nra.

Tá gach eolas ar an gceistneoir seo faoi rún X0

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann
An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

Ceistneoir don Chomhstiúrthóir/Stiurthóir Cúnta

1. **Cé mhéid taithí atá agat mar Chomhstiúrthóir/Stiúrthóir Cúnta?** ______ bliana X1

2. **Cad iad na cáiliochtaí atá agat?** *(Cuir tic le gach ceann atá oiriúnach)*
   - tuismitheoir ☐1 X2-1
   - tuismitheoir a thóg páiste le Gaeilge ☐2 X2-2
   - ardteist ☐3 X2-3
   - cúrsa oiliúna an Chomhchoiste ☐4 X2-4
   - bunmhúinteoir ☐5 X2-5
   - iarbhunmhúinteoir ☐6 X2-6
   - Montessori/Froebel ☐7 X2-7
   - triú leibhéal ☐8 X2-8
   - cúrsaí eile *(tabhair sonraí)* ______________________ ☐9 X2-9

3. **Conas a chuirfeá síos ar do chumas sa Ghaeilge?** *(Cuir tic le ceann amháin)* X3
   - ag dul i bhfeabhas ☐1
   - cumas sásúil ☐2
   - cumas maith ☐3
   - chomh líofa le cainteoir dúchais ☐4
   - cainteoir dúchais (Gaeilge ón gcliabhán agat) ☐5

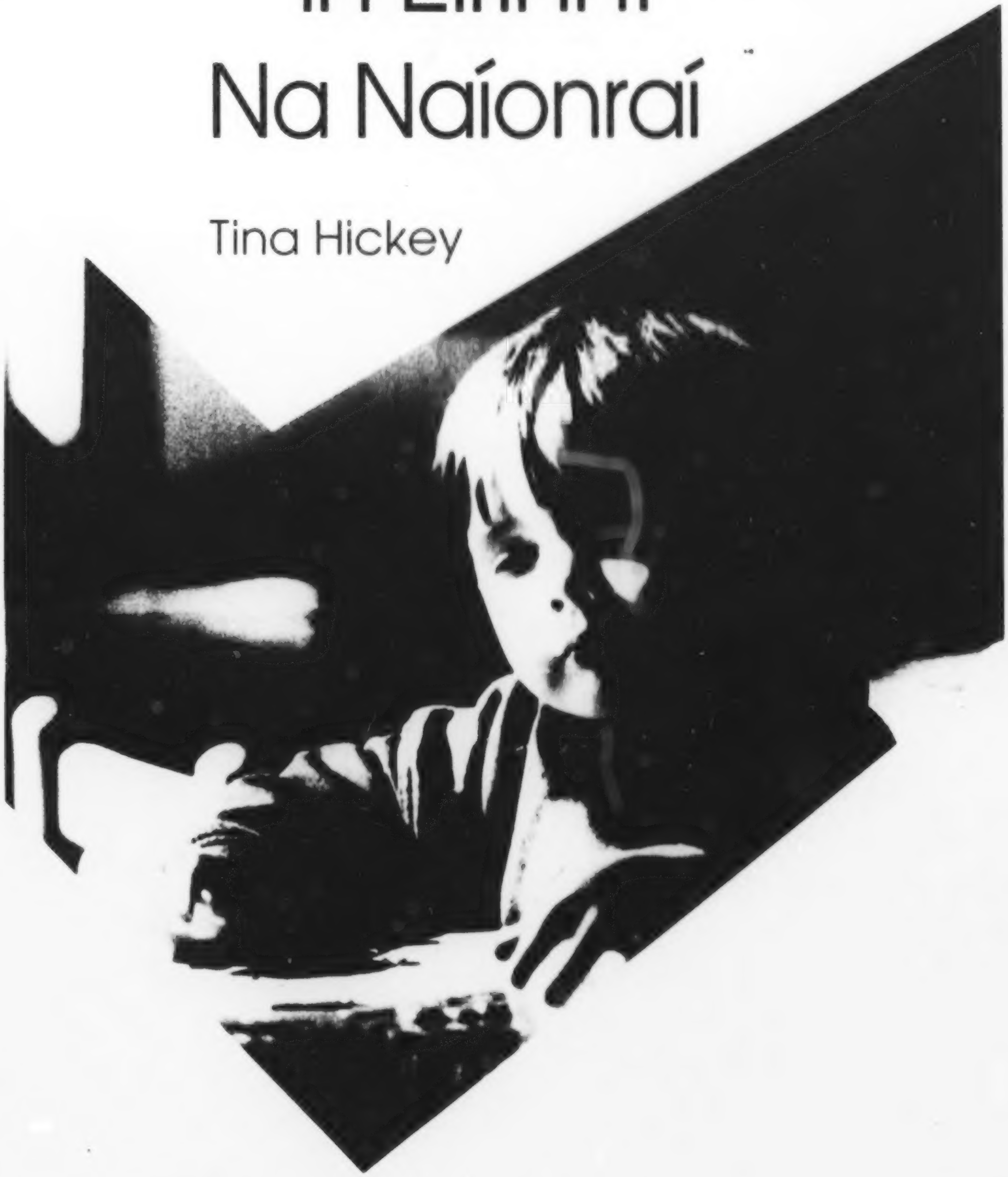
4. **An úsáideann tú Gaeilge sa bhaile?** *(Cuir tic le ceann amháin)* X4
   - ó am go ham ☐1 uaireanta ☐2
   - go minic ☐3 i gcónaí ☐4

5. **Cé chomh minic is a fhreastalaíonn tú ar na cúrsaí inseirbhíse atá ar fáil?** X5
   - ní fhreastalaím ☐1 go hannamh ☐2
   - go minic/gach cúpla uair ☐3 i gcónaí/gach uair ☐4

6. **Ar mhaith leat freastal ar chúrsaí inseirbhíse ar na hábhair seo a leanas?**
   (Cuir tic le na cinn atá ag teastáil uait)
   Cúrsa inseirbhíse ar
   - an tsiceolaíocht ☐1 na healaíona (péintéireacht, úsáid cré *srl*) ☐2 X6-1 X6-2
   - cúrsaí sláinte ☐3 sealbhú an dara teanga ☐4 X6-3 X6-4
   - obair láimhe ☐5 pleanáil oibre sa naíonra ☐6 X6-5 X6-6
   - drámaíocht & puipéid ☐7 úsáid ceoil, rannta & téipeanna ☐8 X6-7 X6-8
   - eile *(tabhair sonraí)* ______________________ ☐9 X6-9

An Luath-Thumadh in Éirinn: Na Naíonraí

Tina Hickey



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De réir mar a leath na naíonraí lán-Ghaeilge ar fud na tíre, cuireadh ceisteanna mar gheall ar an tionchar a bhíonn acu ar na páistí, ó thaobh an oideachais agus na síceolaíochta de, agus is éard atá sa tuarascáil seo ná iarracht ar na ceisteanna seo a fhreagairt trí thaighde eolaíochtúil. Bailíodh sonraí ó beagnach 2,000 tuismitheoir agus ó níos mó ná 170 múinteoir agus comhairleoir. Chomh maith leis sin, rinneadh tástáil ar 225 páistí i 25 naíonraí i ngach cuid den tír, idir Ghalltacht agus Ghaeltacht, maidir leis an dul chun cinn a bhí á dhéanamh acu ó thaobh teanga agus intleachta de. Taispeántar go ndéanann na páistí dul chun cinn suntasach sa Ghaeilge le linn dóibh a bheith sna naíonraí, agus go gcuirtear chomh maith leis an méid Gaeilge a úsáidtear ina dteaghlaigh féin, de bharr go ndeineann na tuismitheoirí iarracht cuidiú leo chun an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim. Tá go leor moltaí sa tuarascáil faoi fhorbairt na naíonraí sna blianta atá romhainn.

Is Oifigeach Taighde í Tina Hickey i Roinn na Síctheangeolaíochta in Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann.

The phenomenal growth of the naionrai or Irish-medium play-schools has raised many educational and psychological questions that are addressed here in a large-scale scientific study. Data were gathered from all of those directly involved in the naionrai. Almost 2,000 parents and over 170 teachers and advisors took part in the survey. In addition, 225 children were tested for cognitive and linguistic development in 25 Irish-medium pre-schools throughout the country, in both Galltacht and Gaeltacht areas. The study shows that children make significant advances in Irish during their period in the naionra, which leads to increased use of Irish in their homes as well, as their parents try to help them in their efforts to acquire the language. The report contains many recommendations for the future development of the naionrai.

The author, Tina Hickey, is a Research Officer in the Department of Psycholinguistics in ITÉ.

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An Luath-Thumadh in Éirinn: Na Naíonraí

Tina Hickey

Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann

I gcuimhne ar mo thuismitheoirí
Mae agus Paddy Hickey

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Buíochas

Is le cabhair ón Tascfórsa um Acmhainní Daonna, Oideachais, Oiliúna agus Óige de chuid Choimisiún na gComhphobal Eorpach, chomh maith le tacaíocht ó Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann agus ón gComhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta a deineadh an staidéar seo agus ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil leis na heagrais sin. Tá mé fíorbhuíoch de Bhairbre Mhic an Iomaire, Uachtarán an Chomhchoiste nuair a cuireadh tús leis an staidéar, do Mháire Uí Ainnín, Príomhfheidhmeannach, agus do Phrionsias Ní Dhorcaí (nach maireann) go háirithe. Thugadar gach tacaíocht dom, agus bhíodar flaithiúil lena gcuid comhairle agus lena gcuid ama ón tús. Gabhaim buíochas le Aingeal Nic Eachmharcaigh ón gComhchoiste a chabhraigh le bailiú na sonraí a eagrú. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil le Peig Uí Chaollaí, a chuir fáilte romham chuig a naíonra féin; bhain mé tairbhe le roinnt blianta anuas as a taithí mar Stiúrthóir. Tá buíochas ar leith ag dul do na Comhairleoirí seo a leanas, a chuir na trialacha ar na páistí, agus a rinne obair chrua go díograiseach agus go garach: Pat de Brún, Máire de Paor, Eilís Grae, Máirín Langford, Máire Mhic Niallais, Aingeal Ó Buachalla, Helen Ó Ciosáin, Áine Uí Lanagáin, Neilí Uí Neachtain agus Treasa Uí Thuathail. Gabhaim buíochas le hUachtarán nua an Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, Deirdre Uí Ghrádaigh, as an tacaíocht a thug sí don tionscadal freisin.

Tá mé go mór faoi chomaoin ag na Stiúrthóirí go léir a chabhraigh liom trí cheistneoirí a líonadh agus trí na trialacha a éascú. Bhí mé ag brath go mór orthu siúd, agus ar na tuismitheoirí agus ar na páistí a bhí páirteach sa tionscadal seo, agus gabhaim buíochas ó chroí leo. Tá mé an-bhuíoch de Eoghan Mac Aogáin, Stiúrthóir ITÉ a thug gach cabhair agus tacaíocht dom ón tús agus a léigh dréachtanna éagsúla den tuarascáil seo. Roinn Pádraig Ó Riagáin a chuid moltaí liom go fial, agus thug sé cead dom leas a bhaint as táblaí speisialta ó shuirbhé ITÉ 1993, agus gabhaim buíochas leis dá bharr. Chabhraigh Dónal Ó Baoill agus Siuán Ní Mhaonaigh liom le roinnt téarmaí Gaeilge a aimsiú, agus táim buíoch díobh. Bhí John Harris, Lelia Murtagh agus Micheál Ó Gliasáin an-chabhrach liom, chomh maith; thug siad comhairle agus moltaí maidir leis na dréachtanna luatha den tuarascáil seo, agus gabhaim buíochas leo. Táim go mór faoi chomaoin ag Teresa Branick, a thug comhairle staitistiúil dom, agus ag Elaine Uí Dhonnchadha agus Donncha Ó Cróinín a thug comhairle ríomhaireachta dom. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a gabháil le Máire Seoighthe, Rúnaí ITÉ, agus le Máire Ní Éafa, Deirdre Ní Bhaoill, Áine Ní Chonghaile agus Órla Ní Chanainn a chabhraigh liom ag pointí áirithe i rith an tionscadail seo. Gabhaim buíochas ó chroí le Tim Callan agus le Caitríona Callan, a thug tacaíocht dom ón tús. Bhain mé tairbhe as an díospóireacht a lean na léachtaí a thug mé ar an staidéar seo le linn dom a bheith ag freastal ar chomhdhálacha de chuid AILA 1996, EUROSLA 1995, Cumann na Teangeolaíochta Feidhmí, European Immersion Institute, International Association for the Study of Child Language agus Cumann Síceolaithe na hÉireann. Ar deireadh, ba mhaith liom buíochas faoi leith a ghabháil le Íosold Ní Dheirg, a chabhraigh liom agus a bhí flaithiúil lena cuid ama ag léamh dréachtanna éagsúla, agus le Máire Ní Ící a cheartaigh na profaí agus a chabhraigh liom na leaganacha Gaeilge agus Béarla a ullmhú don chlódóir.

CLÁR

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Caibidil 1

Réamhrá

1.1 CÚLRA AN STAIDÉIR

Réamhscoil agus í á reáchtáil trí mheán na Gaeilge is ea naíonra. Gaeilge amháin a labhraíonn an Stiúrthóir agus í ag idirghníomhú leis na páistí a bhíonn, de ghnáth, idir trí bliana agus cúig bliana d'aois. Baineann formhór na bpáistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonra le teaghlaigh ina labhraítear an Béarla, agus mar sin is luath-thumadh sa Ghaeilge dóibh é an naíonra. Baineann mionlach na bpáistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonra le teaghlaigh sa Ghaeltacht, nó lasmuigh di, ina labhraítear an Ghaeilge, agus cuireann an naíonra tacaíocht sa mháthairtheanga ar fáil don ghrúpa sin, chomh maith le teagmháil le Béarla ó na páistí eile.

Is é a chuireamar rómhainn sa staidéar seo ná scrúdú cuimsitheach a dhéanamh, den chéad uair, ar scéal naíonraí na tíre, faoina n-áirítear:

- próifíl de shaintréithe na dtuismitheoirí, na bpáistí agus na Stiúrthóirí naíonra
- dearcadh na dtuismitheoirí agus na Stiúrthóirí ar an naíonra agus
- próifíl chumas sa Ghaeilge ó shampla de pháistí naíonra, maidir lena gcumas tuisceana, labhartha agus aithrise.

Aidhm lárnach laistiar den staidéar seo is ea scrúdú a dhéanamh ar na tosca faoina n-éiríonn le sealbhú na Gaeilge sa naíonra.

Bhain scóip níos teoranta le staidéir a rinneadh cheana ar naíonraí ina ndearnadh scrúdú níos mine ar pháistí aonair. Rinne Egan (1981) staidéar píolótach ar 20 naíonra agus ar 80 páiste sa chéad fhorbhreathnú ar thaithí seo an luath-thumtha in Éirinn. Rinne Ní Mhí (1986) suirbhé ar 10 naíonra agus ar a gcuid Stiúrthóirí. Le blianta beaga anuas tháinig grinnstaidéar ar chásanna aonair ó Owens (1992) agus ó Mhic Mhathúna (1993). Níor cuireadh i gcrích go dtí seo, áfach, staidéar ar mhórscála ar naíonraí a mbeadh baint aige le tuismitheoirí chomh maith le Stiúrthóirí, agus sampla mór de pháistí á thástáil ann. Sa bhliain 1992 fuair an Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta tacaíocht ó Thascfhórsa um Acmhainní Daonna, Oideachais, Oiliúna agus Óige de chuid Choimisiúin na gComhphobal Eorpach chun a leithéid de staidéar a dhéanamh. Bheartaíomar ar thionscadal taighde ar mhórscála a chur i gcrích, i gcomhar le hInstitiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann. Is é atá sa tuarascáil seo ná torthaí ar an staidéar sin a rinneadh ar na páistí, na tuismitheoirí, na Stiúrthóirí agus na Comhairleoirí atá páirteach sna naíonraí.

Is den tábhacht é go dtuigfí cad é go díreach a chuireamar rómhainn sa staidéar seo. Thugamar faoi na tosca a bhaineann le dea-shealbhú na Gaeilge laistigh den naíonra a leagan síos, i bhforbhreathnú tuairisciúil meastóireachta. Thugamar faoi phróifíl a sholáthar de na tuismitheoirí sin a roghnaíonn naíonraí dá bpáistí, d'fhonn saintréithe an ghrúpa sin, agus a gcuid riachtanas, a mheas. Thugamar faoi staidéar a dhéanamh ar na Stiúrthóirí leis, i dtéarmaí cáilíochtaí agus cleachtas de, d'fhonn an spriocaimsiú ab fhearr a dhéanamh ar acmhainní amach anseo. De bhrí gur leag an comhlacht maoinithe srianta dochta ama síos maidir leis an tréimhse ullmhúcháin agus bailithe sonraí de, níor fhéadamar, ná níor theastaigh uainn, comparáid a dhéanamh idir an saghas seo réamhscolaíochta agus cineálacha eile atá á soláthar faoi láthair in Éirinn. Níorbh fhéidir, ach chomh beag, staidéar fad-ama a dhéanamh ar ghrúpa páistí naíonra agus ar ghrúpa cóimheasa, sa mhéid nach raibh ach sé mhí ann chun an tionscadal a eagrú agus dul i ngleic le bailiú sonraí. Anuas air sin, níorbh indéanta tabhairt faoi chás-staidéir ar pháistí aonair sna naíonraí. Ina áit sin, eascraíonn an staidéar seo as an eolas a cuireadh ar fáil ar an micrealeibhéal i gcás-staidéir níos luaithe, agus thugamar faoin eolas sin a leathnú go dtí an maicrealeibhéal, trí mheasúnú a dhéanamh ar na haosaigh go léir atá rannpháirteach ann, agus trí thástáil a dhéanamh ar shampla mór páistí ó thaobh chumas sa Ghaeilge de.

1.2 CAD IS NAÍONRA ANN?

De réir an leabhráin *An Tuismitheoir agus an Naíonra* (The Naíonra Explained for Parents, 1994):

> Is é is naíonra ann ná grúpa páistí idir trí agus cúig bliana d'aois a thagann le chéile ar feadh cúpla uair an chloig in aghaidh an lae, faoi threoir Stiúrthóra nó ceannaire, chun spraoi a dhéanamh agus chun foghlaim tríd an spraoi… Dhá phríomhaidhm atá ag an naíonra:
>
> - cabhrú leis an bpáiste forbairt a dhéanamh i ngach slí;
> - cabhrú leis an bpáiste an Ghaeilge a shealbhú nó a c(h)uid Gaeilge a fheabhsú trína húsáid mar mhodh cumarsáide.
>
> Na Naíonraí Gaelacha (1994:5)

Cruthaíonn an Stiúrthóir tascanna taitneamhacha spreagúla do na páistí, tascanna atá oiriúnach dá n-aois, agus é sin trí mheán na Gaeilge. Maireann seisiún sa naíonra idir dhá agus trí uair an chloig, ó Luan go hAoine, de ghnáth, nó roinnt mhaith laethanta ar a laghad. An Ghaeilge amháin a labhraíonn na Stiúrthóirí, ach freagraíonn siad do fhriotal Béarla na bpáistí agus spreagann iad chun úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge atá á sealbhú acu.

An réasúnú atá laistiar de ghluaiseacht na naíonraí, i dtrí chuid atá sé. Tá sé bunaithe ar an mbonn:

1) go ndéanann an t-oideachas réamhscoile leas an pháiste, leas an teaghlaigh agus leas an phobail;
2) go ndéanann páistí óga an dara teanga a shealbhú go nádúrtha ach na tosca cuí a bheith ann;
3) go gcabhraíonn an réamhscolaíocht trí Ghaeilge le leathnú ar úsáid na Gaeilge i réimse an teaghlaigh, rud a chabhraíonn ina dhiaidh sin le himeascadh sa phobal.

Ar bhun 3) thuas, rangódh Fishman (1991) gluaiseacht na naíonraí mar iarracht ar athrú teanga a aisiompú. Tríd is tríd, áfach, bíodh is go leagtar béim ar shealbhú na Gaeilge sa naíonra, bíonn sin amhlaidh i gcomhthéacs fhorás iomlán pearsanta, sóisialta, cognaíoch agus luaileach an pháiste, forás a chothaítear agus a chuirtear chun cinn. Leagann Ó Murchú (1985) béim ar an bpointe sin sa *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí Naíonraí*:

> .....an dá ghné is tábhachtaí de chúram stiúrthóra naíonra:
> a) forbairt iomlán an pháiste trí mhodhanna súgartha;
> b) sealbhú agus saibhriú na Gaeilge.
>
> Ó Murchú (1985:7)

1.3 AN CUR CHUIGE OIDEOLAÍOCH

Is é a dhéantar sa chur chuige oideolaíoch, mar a mholann Ó Murchú sa *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí Naíonraí* (1985:12-13) ná teagasc neamhfhoirmiúil a dhíriú ar riachtanais an pháiste (go háirithe i dtaca le teanga de), i dtimpeallacht struchtúrtha a chuireann spreagadh ar fáil trí réimse leathan bréagán agus gníomhaíochtaí a chur ar fáil, in atmaisféar atá saor ach fós faoi riail. Is iad na himeachtaí lárnacha a mholann Ní Ailpín (1985:20) sa lámhleabhar ná: 'péintéireacht agus líníocht, imirt le brící, gaineamh fliuch, gaineamh tirim, uisce, cré, taos; gníomhaíochtaí sa chúinne baile, i gcúinne na leabhar; ceol agus luail'. Nuair a bhíonn an páiste gafa leis na himeachtaí sin, cuireann an Stiúrthóir an friotal cuí ar fáil, bíodh sin i bhfoirm nathanna simplí, nó le rainn nó le hamhráin, chun cur síos a dhéanamh ar ghníomhartha na bpáistí, nó tagairt a dhéanamh dóibh, agus sa tslí sin ceanglaítear an teanga nua i gcónaí le comhthéacs a bhfuil brí leis. Is é an aidhm ná go mbeadh nasc nádúrtha ag an nGaeilge a chloistear sa naíonra le beatha an pháiste, lena réimse spéise agus riachtanas, seachas í a bheith bunaithe ar mhodhanna struchtúrtha chun teanga a mhúineadh.

1.4 TUMOIDEACHAS AGUS AN RÉAMHSCOLAÍOCHT

Rinneadh an chéad thurgnamh beartaithe i Meán Fómhair 1965, i rang ciondargairdín in Montreal, Québec. Tagraíonn an tumoideachas d'úsáid teanga eile seachas teanga dhúchais an pháiste mar mheán teagaisc. Ní hionann é agus 'bá-oideachas' ina gcuirtear iallach ar pháistí lucht imirce, nó ar pháistí a labhraíonn teanga a ngabhann stádas íseal léi, glacadh le teagasc acadúil trí mheán an dara teanga acu (T2), go minic i dteannta páistí eile ar cainteoirí dúchais sa teanga sin iad, áit nach dtuigeann an múinteoir teanga dhúchais na bpáistí seo agus gan ranganna tacaíochta T2 a bheith ar fáil dóibh (Skuttnabb-Kangas 1988:40). I gcásanna mar sin báitear páistí sa teanga nua agus bíonn an T1 acu faoi bhagairt de dheasca easpa tacaíochta ar bhonn leathan sóisialta.

I gcláir thumoideachais ar nós na naíonraí agus chóras na nGaelscoileanna in Éirinn, tugtar tacaíocht ar bhonn an phobail agus ar bhonn na sochaí do theanga an mhóraimh (an Béarla), agus cuirtear teanga na scoile (an Ghaeilge) le stór teangeolaíoch an pháiste. I gcás an mhionlaigh ar cainteoirí T1 na Gaeilge iad, tugann an naíonra, nó an Ghaelscoil, tacaíocht fhoirmiúil don teanga mhionlaigh seo, teanga nach mbíonn in úsáid go rómhinic sna meáin chumarsáide, nó i measc an phobail Éireannaigh trí chéile, fad is go dtugtar tacaíocht i gcoitinne do scileanna teanga agus litearthachta T2 an Bhéarla a fhoghlaimítear ar scoil, tacaíocht ó pháistí eile ar Béarlóirí T1 iad, ón bpobal i gcoitinne in Éirinn agus ó na meáin chumarsáide go forleathan.

Léirigh Swain (1981) gur dócha gur fearr a d'éireodh le páistí an dara teanga a shealbhú sa tumoideachas más cuid den mhóramh láidir sóisialta iad ó thaobh teanga agus cultúr an bhaile, mar shampla Béarlóirí Cheanada ag freastal ar thumadh Fraincise. I dtaca leis an dearcadh ar theanga nua de, rinne Artigal (1991) amach gur den riachtanas é nach mbrúfaí clár tumtha ar shochaí áirithe i gcoitinne, ná ar pháistí aonair, agus nach ndiúltófaí go díreach, nó go hindíreach, do theanga an pháiste féin. Cheap Artigal go raibh an cur chuige oideolaíoch a úsáidtear sa tum-réamhscolaíocht thar a bheith tábhachtach.

Léiríonn Ellis (1994:225) go bhfuil go leor saghsanna difriúla tumchlár ann:

- luath-thumadh (ó chiondargairdín), nó
- tumadh déanach (mar shampla, ó Ghrád 4 go 7 sa chóras Ceanadach), agus
- lántumadh (gach teagasc tríd an T2) nó
- páirt-tumadh (roinnt ábhar á dteagasc tríd an T2).

Rinne Genesee (1984, 1987) athbhreithniú ar an taighde ar shaghsanna éagsúla tumchlár i gCeanada, agus rinne amach go ngnóthaíonn tumdhaltaí chomh maith i gcúrsaí acadúla le páistí i gcomhthéacs neamhthumtha, nó níos fearr. Ina theannta sin, thaispeáin sé go sealbhaíonn siad gnáthoilteacht sa Bhéarla (T1), chomh maith le hardleibhéal líofachta sa Fhraincis (T2). D'úsáid Cummins (1988) agus Cummins agus Swain (1986) an 'prionsabal idirspleáchais'[1] le míniú cén fáth nach mbíonn tionchar diúltach ar scileanna na ndaltaí sa chéad teanga i suíomh fábhrach an tumoideachais. Mhaígh Cummins go bhfuil an 'oilteacht chognaíoch acadúil teanga'[2] bunaithe ar bhunoilteacht chomónta agus go gcuireann taithí ar cheachtar den dá theanga ina leithéid de shuíomh le forbairt an chumais seo sa dá theanga.

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[1] Is é an 'interdependency principle' an téarma a úsáideann Cummins (1981).

[2] Is é 'cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) an téarma a úsáideann Cummins (1981).

Tugann achoimre Genesee ar an taighde ar thumadh le fios gur fearr na torthaí, agus gach rud san áireamh, a bhíonn ar lántumadh ná ar pháirt-tumadh agus gur fearr luath-thumadh ná tumadh déanach. Déantar scrúdú níos mine ar thorthaí an luath-thumtha i Mír 1.4.1

1.4.1 Torthaí ar Luath-Thumadh

Is iomaí staidéar a rinneadh ar éifeacht an luath-thumtha ar fhorás cognaíoch, acadúil agus teangeolaíoch an pháiste, agus ní thagraítear ach do cuid den taighde anseo. Léiríonn torthaí ar mheasúnuithe ar roinnt clár seanbhunaithe, iad siúd i gCeanada, cuir i gcás (Swain agus Lapkin 1982; agus Genesee 1984, 1987), go leor éifeachtaí fábhracha. Na páistí sin a théann ar aghaidh agus a fhreastalaíonn ar bhunscoileanna agus ar mheánscoileanna tumtha, baineann siad amach ardleibhéal oilteachta sa T2 acu, chomh maith le gnáthchumas sa T1, agus léiríonn siad na leibhéil chéanna forbartha acadúla, nó leibhéil níos fearr ná mar a léiríonn a bpiaraí ar cuireadh oideachas orthu i scoileanna neamhthumtha.

Rinne Comblain agus Rondal (1993) staidéar ar ghrúpa páistí 4-5 bliana i suíomh luath-thumtha sa Fhrainc, áit a raibh an Béarla ina theanga teagaisc, agus rinne comparáid idir iad agus a bpiaraí aonteangacha. Léirigh na torthaí go raibh feabhas ar scileanna labhartha Béarla an tumghrúpa, agus níor deineadh aon dochar dá scileanna Fraincise i gcomparáid leo súid sa ghnáthchóras. Fuair Bamford agus Mizokawa (1991) amach gurbh fhearr i mbun réiteach faidhbe neamhbhriathartha iad páistí i dtumrang Spáinnise ná na daltaí neamhthumtha sa staidéar.

Léirigh Bialystok (1986) go raibh rialú cognaíoch[1] (gné de chumas meiteatheangeolaíoch[2]) níos fearr ag páistí i nGrád 1 de thumchlár Fraincise ná mar a bhí ag a bpiaraí aonteangacha. Fuair Goncz agus Kodzolpelkic (1991) amach, chomh maith, gurbh fhearr an cumas meiteatheangeolaíoch agus na scileanna anailíse teangeolaíche a bhí ag páistí faoi chláir thumtha réamhscoile ná mar a bhí ag an ngrúpa aonteangach sa staidéar. Is fearr a thuigeadar an ceangal idir ní éigin agus a ainm agus bhíodar níos oilte i mbun focail a bhriseadh ina siollaí agus ina bhfóinéimí. Léirigh siad, chomh maith, gurbh fhearr an comhdhíriú aigne[3] a bhí ag na páistí sin a raibh taithí acu ar chláir thumtha dhátheangacha, agus go raibh scileanna níos forbartha acu chun sintéisiú agus teibiú[4], scileanna atá riachtanach don léitheoireacht. Is é a thuigeadar as sin gur dealraitheach go gcothaíonn an taithí dhátheangach sa tumoideachas tuiscint anailíseach ar an rud is teanga ann.

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[1] 'Cognitive control'.

[2] 'Metalinguistic ability'.

[3] 'Concentration'.

[4] 'Synthesis and abstraction'.

Scrúdaigh Neufeld (1993) dhá ghrúpa de mhic léinn ollscoile in Ottawa, a raibh ceann acu tar éis freastal ar chlár luath-thumtha Fraincise. Fuair sé amach nach ndearna an luath-thumadh seo dochar ar bith sa neastéarma, ná san fhadtéarma, agus an bhrí a bhain sé as sin gur dealraitheach gur sochar teangeolaíoch agus cognaíoch a dhéantar nuair a fhoghlaimítear teanga eile go luath i suíomh tumoideachais.

Dá réir sin, léiríonn fianaise an taighde go láidir gur dea-thoradh a leanann luath-thumadh i gcás páistí theanga an mhóraimh nuair nach bhfuil a gcéad teanga i mbaol, agus gnóthachtáil acadúil normálta, nó gnóthachtáil níos fearr, mar thoradh air sin, chomh maith le gnáthscileanna sa chéad teanga agus ardscileanna sa dara teanga. Fuarthas amach, anuas air sin, gurb ann do réimse éifeachtaí sóisialta a bhaineann le dearcadh cultúrtha níos oscailte, agus le caoinfhulaingt, chomh maith le héifeachtaí cognaíocha ar nós smaointeoireacht eisréimneach[1]. Is ann, leis, d'éifeachtaí sóisialta nach beag a éiríonn as cláir luath-thumtha a bhunú. Mar shampla, tum-réamhscolaíocht in Iosrael, sa Nua-Shéalainn, in Albain agus sa Bhreatain Bheag, bhí baint thábhachtach aici le cuidiú le gluaiseachtaí athbheochana teanga sna tíortha sin, agus chuir sí leis an éileamh - nó chruthaigh sí é i gcásanna áirithe - ar chláir thumtha bhunscoile a sholáthar. Dealraíonn sé gur fíor sin freisin i gcás na hÉireann, nuair a d'fhás éileamh ar bhunscoileanna lánGhaeilge i go leor cásanna de bharr go raibh tuismitheoirí sásta le taithí an linbh sa naíonra agus gur theastaigh uathu leanúint leis an tumadh (féach Ní Mhaoláin, 1995 agus Maguire, 1991).

1.4.2 Tumoideachas agus Teangacha Neamhfhorleathana

Faightear an tumoideachas ar fud an domhain, rud a léiríonn riachtanais na dtíortha ilteangacha éagsúla. Faightear samplaí den luath-thumadh a gcuirtear tús leis ag leibhéal an chiondargairdín i roinnt mhaith tíortha eile, Tír na mBascach, cuir i gcás, an Chatalóin, an Fhionlainn, Iosrael, an Nua-Shéalainn, Albain agus an Bhreatain Bheag, chomh maith le Poblacht na hÉireann agus Tuaisceart Éireann. Rinne Ó Murchú (1987) forbhreathnú cuimsitheach ar sholáthar na réamhscolaíochta trí 29 teanga neamhfhorleathan ar fud na hEorpa (san Ísiltír, sa Fhrainc, sa Bhreatain, san Iodáil, i Lucsamburg, sa Bheilg, sa Danmhairg, sa Ghearmáin, sa Phortaingéil, sa Spáinn agus i bPoblacht na hÉireann). I gcás teangacha mionlaigh mar iad, tháinig borradh faoin tum-réamhscolaíocht mar gur theastaigh ó thuismitheoirí teagmháil a bheith ag a bpáistí le teanga mhionlaigh nó le teanga stairiúil[2], teanga a d'fhéadfadh a bheith mar mháthairtheanga nó mar dhara teanga ag na páistí. Feidhmíonn na naíonraí mar luath-thumadh i gcás mhóramh na bpáistí a bhaineann le teaghlaigh ina labhraítear an Béarla. Ina theannta sin, cuireann siad oideachas réamh-bhunscoile ar fáil sa mháthairtheanga, laistigh agus lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht araon, don mhionlach sin arb í an Ghaeilge teanga an teaghlaigh acu. Thug van der Goot, Renkema agus Stuijt (1994) grinnchuntas ar sholáthar na réamhscolaíochta i gcuid de theangacha neamhfhorleathana na hEorpa agus léiríodar an spéis agus an fás, go háirithe le scór bliain anuas, atá le sonrú.

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[1] 'Divergent thinking'.

[2] 'Heritage language'.

1.5 CEISTEANNA TAIGHDE

Chuireamar rómhainn sa staidéar seo cur síos a dhéanamh ar ghrúpa páistí agus ar a dtaithí ar luath-thumadh sa Ghaeilge sna naíonraí, ní hamháin chun an toradh teangeolaíoch a mheas, ach chun éifeacht an phobail agus éifeacht shaintréithe a dteaghlach ar chumas na bpáistí sa teanga a mheas, chomh maith leis an tionchar a bhíonn ag an taithí seo ar thuismitheoirí, ar theaghlaigh agus ar phobail. Is iad na ceisteanna taighde a ardaítear ná:

- Cé mhéad Gaeilge a fhoghlaimíonn páistí sa naíonra?
- Cad iad na príomhthosca ar leibhéal an pháiste, an teaghlaigh agus an naíonra a mbíonn éifeacht acu ar an dul chun cinn a dhéanann an páiste sa Ghaeilge?
- Cé na scileanna agus na riachtanais a bhaineann leo siúd a oibríonn i naíonraí, na Stiúrthóirí?
- Cén phróifíl atá ag na tuismitheoirí sin a roghnaíonn naíonra dá bpáistí?
- Cén éifeacht a bhíonn ag an naíonra ar an teaghlach, dar leis na tuismitheoirí, agus
- Cad iad riachtanais na dtuismitheoirí?

Cuirtear síos i gCaibidil 2 ar an modh bailithe sonraí a úsáideadh chun dul i ngleic leis na ceisteanna thuas. Léirítear i gCaibidlí 3 agus 4 torthaí an taighde ar na tuismitheoirí. Tugtar cuntas i gCaibidil 5 ar an suirbhé ar na Stiúrthóirí. Cuirtear síos i gCaibidil 6 ar na trialacha, agus na torthaí a bhain na páistí amach. Scrúdaítear i gCaibidil 7 an tionchar a bhí ag malartaigh éagsúla ar na torthí sin. Pléitear na himpleachtaí i gCaibidil 8.

1.6 CONCLÚIDÍ

Gné amháin den spéis mhór a chuirtear san oideachas réamhscoile in Éirinn is ea bunú na réamhscolaíochta trí mheán na Gaeilge. Tá na buntáistí a bhaineann leis an oideachas réamhscoile, go háirithe i measc grúpaí atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste, cruthaithe ag an taighde a rinneadh i roinnt mhaith tíortha. Léiriú is ea leibhéal na rannpháirtíochta san oideachas réamhscoile in Éirinn gur gá monatóireacht a dhéanamh ar chaighdeáin sa réimse seo, d'fhonn a chinntiú gur de cháilíocht ard é an soláthar réamh-bhunscoile.

Mar bhonn agus mar thacaíocht leis an éileamh ó thuismitheoirí ar réamhscolaíocht trí mheán na Gaeilge tá na cláir thumtha idirnáisiúnta, ar éirigh chomh maith sin leo. Léiríonn torthaí taighde idirnáisiúnta gurb ann do thimpeallacht dhearfach abhus chun go n-éireodh le luath-thumadh sa naíonra; tugann an tsochaí an-tacaíocht go deo do theanga bhaile an mhóraimh (an Béarla), cinntíonn córas tumtha roghnach inspreagadh ard agus dearcadh deimhneach i measc na rannpháirtithe, leagann an cur chuige oideolaíoch béim ar ionchur sothuigthe a chur ar fáil don pháiste i gcomhthéacs fhorbairt iomlán an pháiste, agus spreagann sé cumarsáid sa T2. Béimníonn an plé a dhéantar ar theangacha neamhfhorleathana cearta lucht labhartha na Gaeilge chun oideachas lánGhaeilge a chur ar fáil dá bpáistí, más mian leo go mairfeadh a máthairtheanga laistigh de shochaí dhátheangach. Taispeánann sé, chomh maith, an gá atá le tumadh réamhscoile a fheiceáil laistigh de ghluaiseacht athbheochana teanga níos leithne, agus gach áis aici, chomh maith leis an stát a bheith go follasach laistiar di.

Caibidil 2

Scóip an Staidéir

2.1 DAONÁIREAMH

Beartaíodh ar thús a chur leis an tionscadal seo trí Dhaonáireamh a reáchtáil ar gach páiste a d'fhreastail ar naíonra i bPoblacht na hÉireann i mí Feabhra na bliana 1993, chun fráma samplála a bhunú. Thaispeán an Daonáireamh líon na seisiún naíonra a d'eagraigh gach Stiúrthóir, líon na bpáistí i ngach seisiún, chomh maith le líon na mbuachaillí agus na gcailíní agus a ndáta breithe. Bhí foirm eile a thug uimhir aitheantais do gach páiste chun na sonraí a choimeád faoi rún; iarradh ar na Stiúrthóirí ar an bhfoirm seo cuntas a thabhairt ar theanga bhaile gach dalta agus ar a (h)inniúlacht sa Ghaeilge tráth bailithe na sonraí. Iarradh orthu, chomh maith, a rá cén scoil ar a rachadh an páiste ina dhiaidh sin, má b'eol dóibh sin. Tugtar na sonraí sa chaibidil seo.

2.1.1 Líon Iomlán na Naíonraí agus a nDáileadh

Bhí 190 seisiún naíonra[1] i bPoblacht na hÉireann i mí Feabhra 1993 agus thart ar 2,600 páiste ag freastal orthu. Bhí 174 Stiúrthóir i mbun na seisiún sin (agus 16 Stiúrthóir díobh i mbun an dara seisiún ar an láthair chéanna[2]). Bhí ráta freagartha 96% ar an Daonáireamh. Sa mhéid a leanas cuirtear síos ar na 182 seisiún naíonra a tuairiscíodh sna foirmeacha Daonáirimh agus tagraítear dóibh mar naíonraí an Daonáirimh. D'fhreastail 2,487 páiste san iomlán ar na naíonraí sin, 1,862 díobh i gceantair ina labhraítear an Béarla (na Galltachtaí) agus 625 díobh i gceantair ina labhraítear an Ghaeilge (na Gaeltachtaí).

Léiríonn Fíor 2.1 dáileadh iomlán na 190 seisiún naíonra i mí Feabhra 1993. Is i gceantair uirbeacha Bhaile Átha Cliath agus sna contaetha atá buailte leis atá an comhchruinniú naíonraí is mó. Ní tearc iad líon na naíonraí i gceantair faoin

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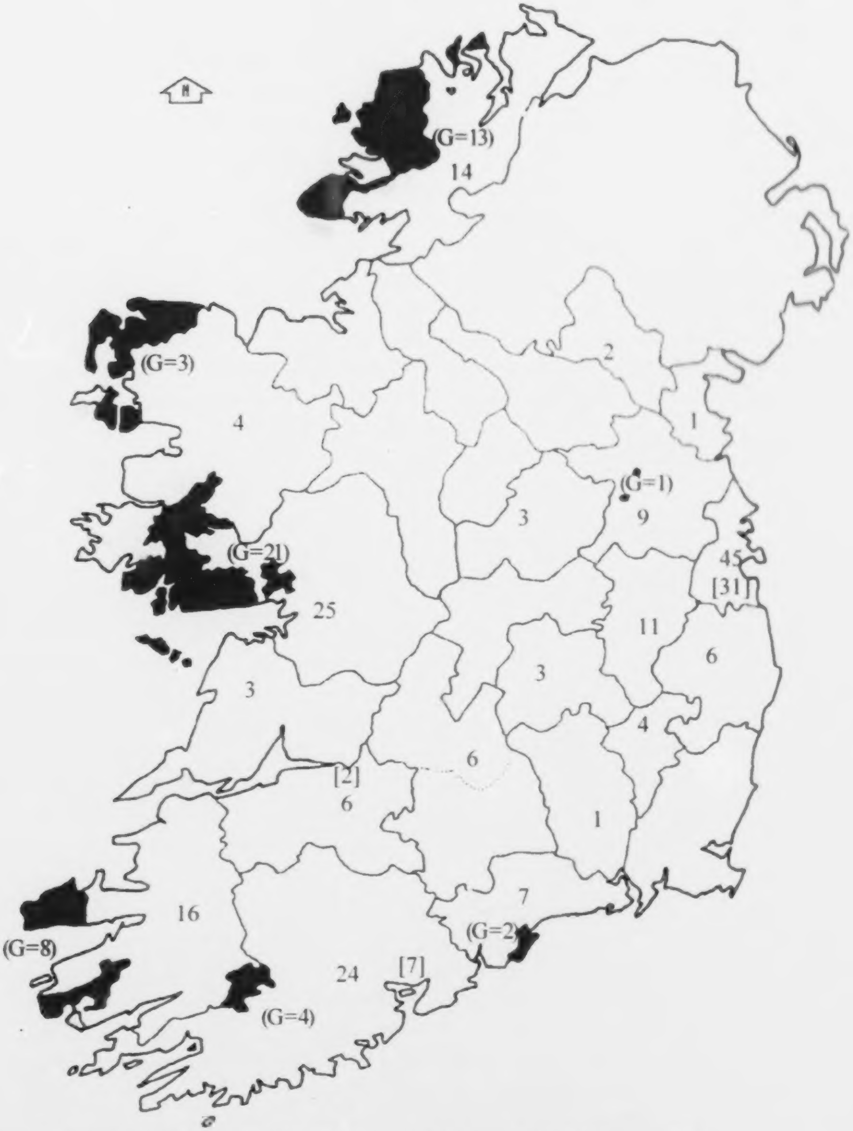
[1] Ní hionann an uimhir seo agus líon na naíonraí sa Tuarascáil Bhliantúil don bhliain 1993, toisc go gcuireann an Comhcoiste Réamhscolaíochta líon na bpáistí san áireamh agus iad ag comhaireamh lion na naíonraí. Ní dhéantar amhlaidh sa staidéar seo, agus comhraítear seisiún anseo mar grúpa páistí ag freastal ar naíonra ag am faoi leith, is cuma cé mhéad páistí.

[2] Is é is seisiún dúbailte ann ná naíonra a sholáthar do ghrúpa eile páistí ag am nach ionann agus am an chéad ghrúpa, sa suíomh céanna, agus an Stiúrthóir céanna á rith de ghnáth.

Fíor 2.1 Dáileadh na naíonraí i bPoblacht na hÉireann 1993 (líon na seisiún naíonra)


N
(G=13)
14
(G=3)
4
2
1
(G=1)
9
3
(G=21)
25
45
[31]
11
6
3
3
4
6
[2]
6
1
7
(G=2)
16
(G=8)
24
[7]
(G=4)

Foinse: Daonáireamh Naíonraí, Feabhra 1993

Iomlán na Seisiún Naíonra = 190
Galltacht = 138
Gaeltacht = 52

Nóta: Seasann 'G' do sheisiún Gaeltachta; seasann uimhir i mbosca do sheisiún cathrach. Cuirtear an dá fhigiúr san áireamh san iomlán don chontae.

tuath ar Gaeltachtaí iad (seasann 'G' do líon na seisiún Gaeltachta agus áirítear iad mar chuid iomlán an chontae). Is gnách gur scaipthe go maith iad i gceantair eile faoin tuath, agus ní raibh naíonra ar bith i gcontaetha áirithe i 1993, an Cabhán, mar shampla, Liatroim, an Longfort, Uíbh Fhailí, Ros Comáin, Sligeach agus Loch Garman.

Léiríonn Tábla 2.1 dáileadh iomlán na seisiún naíonra i gceantair Ghalltachta agus i gceantair Ghaeltachta de réir shonraí an Daonáirimh.

Tábla 2.1 Líon na naíonraí sa Daonáireamh i gceantair Ghalltachta agus i gceantair Ghaeltachta

Dáileadh na Seisiún sa Daonáireamh	*Galltacht*	*Gaeltacht*	*Iomlán*
Líon na seisiún aonair	106	46	152
Líon na naíonraí ag a raibh an dara seisiún (Stiúrthóir céanna)	13	2	15
Líon iomlán na seisiún	132	50	182
Líon iomlán na bpáistí	1862	625	2487
Meánuimhir na bpáistí in aghaidh an tseisiúin	14.1	12.5	13.7

I naíonraí Gaeltachta atá thart ar an gceathrú cuid de na páistí, agus trí cheathrú díobh i naíonraí Galltachta. Is lú ar meán iad na naíonraí Gaeltachta ná na naíonraí Galltachta; 12.5 a líon sin ar meán i gcomparáid le 14.1.

2.1.2 Líon na bPáistí in aghaidh an tSeisiúin

Bíonn suas le 10 bpáiste ag 37% de na seisiúin Ghalltachta, idir 11 agus 20 páiste ag 47% agus níos mó ná 21 páiste ag an 15% atá fágtha[1]. Bíonn suas le 10 bpáiste ag formhór (58%) na seisiún sa Ghaeltacht, agus idir 11 agus 20 páiste ag 40% díobh. Faigheann seisiúin sa Ghaeltacht deontas ó Údarás na Gaeltachta, rud a chuireann ar a gcumas grúpaí níos lú a choimeád ar bun.

2.1.3 Cóimheasa Daltaí agus Múinteoirí

An Stiúrthóir a reáchtálann tuairim is a leath de na seisiúin naíonra le cúnamh ó Chomh-Stiúrthóir/Stiúrthóir Cúnta amháin nó níos mó. Is den tábhacht é, mar sin, féachaint ar an gcóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí i gcás pháistí an Daonáirimh. Is ionann agus 10[2] iad, nó níos lú ná sin, cóimheasa daltaí is múinteoirí fhormhór na seisiún (70%) i gceantair ina labhraítear an Béarla. I 1993, áfach, bhí 29% eile de naíonraí Galltachta agus cóimheasa idir 10 agus 15:1 acu, agus an fuílleach (1.5%) le cóimheasa níos mó ná 15:1 acu. Bhí na cóimheasa cuid mhaith níos ísle i gceantair Ghaeltachta, agus cóimheasa suas le 10:1 ag 98% de na seisiúin sin i 1993. Arís, is den tábhacht é a thuiscint go bhfuair na naíonraí Gaeltachta fóirdheontas ó Údarás na Gaeltachta, rud a chabhraíonn leo feidhmiú le cóimheas íseal daltaí is múinteoirí.

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[1] Tabhair faoi deara nach ionann líon na bpáistí agus an cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí, sa mhéid nach gcuirtear an cúntóir san áireamh.

[2] Sonraíonn an scéim árachais cóimheas 10 bpáiste-aosach amháin ar a mhéad. Rinneadh eisceacht i 1993 i naíonraí áirithe áit a raibh aosach eile ar an láthair, a raibh fáil air i gcás éigeandála. Ó 1995 i leith, ní dhéantar na heisceachtaí seo - ní cheadaítear cóimheas níos airde ná 10:1 a bheith

2.1.4 Gnéas

Léirigh an t-eolas Daonáirimh a chuir na Stiúrthóirí ar fáil gur buachaillí iad 50.7% den tinreamh agus gur cailíní iad 49.3% agus is beag difear a bhí idir na ceantair Ghaeltachta agus na ceantair Ghalltachta.

2.1.5 Dáileadh na bPáistí de réir Aoise

Dhá dtrian de na páistí a bhí ag freastal ar naíonraí in Aibreán 1993 is idir 3.5 agus 4.5 bliana a bhí siad, agus thart ar an séú cuid díobh níos sine ná 4.5 bliana, agus an séú cuid a bhí fágtha níos óige ná 3.5 bliana. Faightear coibhneas níos airde de pháistí níos óige, suas le 3 bliana (7.2%), i naíonraí na gceantar Gaeltachta, i gcomparáid leis an nGalltacht (2.2%). Seachas sin, is ionann, geall leis, na dáltaí sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht de réir aoise.

4.1 aois na ndaltaí, ar meán, a tuairiscíodh i nDaonáireamh na Naíonraí in Aibreán 1993. Bhí na páistí i gceantair an Bhéarla thart ar mhí níos sine, ar meán, ná iad siúd a bhí i naíonraí Gaeltachta.

2.1.6 Líon na bPáistí sa Dara Bliain i Naíonraí

Tuairiscíodh 81% de na páistí san iomlán a bheith sa chéad bhliain ar naíonra, agus 19% sa dara bliain. Bhí coibhneas beagán níos airde sa dara bliain sa Ghaeltacht (21% i gcomórtas le 18% sa Ghalltacht) agus d'fhéadfadh gurb é is cúis leis sin líon na ndaltaí an-óg a bheith ábhairín níos mó ansin.

2.1.7 Teanga Bhaile na bPáistí agus a gCumas sa Ghaeilge

Iarradh ar na Stiúrthóirí a chur in iúl, chomh fada agus ab eol dóibh, an teanga/na teangacha a labhraítear i dteaghlach gach páiste. Léiríonn Tábla 2.2 dáileadh na dtorthaí sin. Ba é tuairim na Stiúrthóirí nach raibh ach thart ar 23% de pháistí naíonraí na Gaeltachta agus thart ar 1% de pháistí naíonraí na Galltachta ar de theaghlaigh iad nach labhraítear iontu ach an Ghaeilge. Measadh go raibh 34% agus 15% eile, faoi seach, i gceantair Ghaeltachta agus i gceantair Ghalltachta, ar de theaghlaigh dhátheangacha iad. Déanfar plé níos mine ar theanga bhaile na bpáistí i gCaibidil 4, sa mhír a bhaineann le ceistneoir na dtuismitheoirí.

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ag naíonra ar bith. Tagann sé seo le Rialacha an Achta um Chúram Leanaí, atá i bhfeidhm anois.

Tábla 2.2 Teanga bhaile na bpáistí (Tuairisc an Stiúrthóra)

Teanga(cha) an Bhaile	*Galltacht* *N=1617* *%*	*Gaeltacht* *N=607* *%*	*Iomlán* *N=2224* *%*
Béarla amháin	84.0	43.5	73.0
Gaeilge agus Béarla	14.7	33.8	19.9
Gaeilge amháin	1.2	22.6	7.0
Teanga(cha) eile	0.1	0.2	0.1
Iomlán	100.0	100.0[1]	100.0

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[1] Níl suimiú na bhfigiúirí cothrom le 100% i ngach cás sna táblaí sa tuarascáil seo, toisc gur figiúirí slánaithe atá i gceist.

Iarradh ar na Stiúrthóirí chomh maith cumas gach dalta sa Ghaeilge, roimh Cháisc 1993, a mheas agus dhá théarma ar a laghad caite ag formhór na bpáistí sa naíonra (agus 19% díobh a raibh suas le 5 théarma caite acu ann). Tugtar na torthaí i dTábla 2.3.

Tábla 2.3 Breithmheas na Stiúrthóirí ar Ghaeilge na bpáistí

Grádú an Stiúrthóra ar Ghaeilge gach páiste	*Galltacht* *N=1635* *%*	*Gaeltacht* *N=606* *%*	*Iomlán* *N=2241* *%*
Tuiscint amháin	10.6	8.4	10.0
Cúpla focal	28.4	18.3	25.7
Roinnt frásaí	46.8	32.7	43.0
Cumas maith	13.1	19.6	14.9
Cainteoir dúchais	1.0	21.0	6.4
Iomlán	100.0	100.0	100.0

Measadh gur tuiscint amháin a bhí ag an deichiú cuid de pháistí na Galltachta agus ginchumas éigin ag trí cheathrú díobh, ó 'cúpla focal' go 'roinnt frásaí'. Measadh cumas maith ar a laghad sa Ghaeilge a bheith ag an gcuid eile, 14%.

I naíonraí na Gaeltachta, leis, measadh gur tuiscint amháin a bhí ag thart ar an deichiú cuid agus ginchumas éigin ag thart ar a leath ('cúpla focal' nó 'roinnt frásaí'). Mheas na Stiúrthóirí 'cumas maith' nó 'cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas' a bheith ag an 40% eile i naíonraí Gaeltachta.

2.1.8 Pleananna le haghaidh Bunscolaíochta

Iarradh ar Stiúrthóirí tuairisciú a dhéanamh ar an gcineál bunscoile a mbeadh gach páiste ag freastal uirthi. Mheas na Stiúrthóirí gur dócha go bhfreastalódh thart ar 40% de pháistí na Galltachta ar scoil lánGhaelach, i gcomórtas le 76% de pháistí na Gaeltachta. Ar an taobh eile den scéal, bhíothas ag súil go bhfreastalódh 52% de pháistí na Galltachta ar scoileanna Béarla, i gcomórtas le 20% de pháistí naíonra na Gaeltachta. (Ní raibh eolas ar na pleananna scolaíochta a bhí ag an bhfuílleach sa dá ghrúpa). Caithfear a thuiscint, áfach, nach gá go mbeadh fáil ar an scoil a roghnódh na tuismitheoirí: i gceantair uirbeacha ach go háirithe, d'fhéadfadh nach mbeadh slí do pháistí sa scoil a roghnaíonn a dtuismitheoirí dóibh. Pléifear roghnú scoile arís i gCaibidil 4.

2.2 SCÓIP AN TIONSCADAIL

Tugann Tábla 2.4 léargas ar an eolas a bailíodh mar phríomhchuid den tionscadal seo. Mar chuid de sin bhí ceistneoir a cuireadh faoi bhráid chomhpháirtithe aosacha uile na naíonraí, is é sin na tuismitheoirí, na Stiúrthóirí, a gcúntóirí, agus na Comhairleoirí. Anuas air sin, rinneadh measúnú ar dhul chun cinn na bpáistí sna naíonraí.

2.2.1 Tástáil ar Pháistí

Cuireadh tástáil i bhfeidhm ar shampla de 225 páiste as 25 naíonra, a toghadh as an bhfráma samplála a chuir an Daonáireamh naíonraí ar fáil. Triail aonair a bhí ann ar a dtuiscint agus ar a gcuid Gaeilge labhartha (ginchumas), agus triail ar fhorbairt ghinearálta cognaíoch ina dteanga dhúchais. Ba iad na Comhairleoir áitiúla a chuir triail ar na páistí, toisc taithí fhada a bheith acu ar a bheith ag déileáil le páistí sa naíonra. Ina theannta sin, bhí cur amach acu ar pháistí an cheantair ó na cuairteanna rialta a thugann siad ar gach naíonra, agus bhí taithí ag na páistí ar Ghaeilge amháin a chloisteáil uathu.

Rinne an Stiúrthóir féin measúnú, leis, ar pháistí an tsampla seo, maidir lena scileanna sóisialta agus fisiciúla, maidir lena neamhspléachas, a scileanna teanga agus a gcumas foghlamtha sa dara teanga. Ceapadh an measúnú sin chun breis eolais a chur ar fáil, eolas nach bhfaighfí ó thriail oibiachtúil agus an teorainn ama a bhainfeadh leis.

2.2.2 Ceistneoir na dTuismitheoirí

Cuireadh ceistneoir dátheangach do thuismitheoirí le chéile agus an Stiúrthóir a dháil. Aithníodh gach ceistneoir de réir ainm baiste an pháiste agus an chéad iniseal den sloinne amháin (chun a dheimhniú go bhfaigheadh gach tuismitheoir an fhoirm cheart), móide uimhir aitheantais an pháiste d'fhonn próiseáil na tástála a choimeád faoi rún agus le go meaitseálfaí na torthaí le torthaí thriail an pháiste, chomh maith le ceistneoir an Stiúrthóra, agus le meastóireacht an Chomhairleora. D'fhéadfadh máthair nó athair an pháiste ceistneoir na dtuismitheoirí a chomhlánú i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla, agus sheol na tuismitheoirí ar ais i gclúdach réamhíoctha é, chun go bpróiseálfadh an fhoireann taighde é. Ba í an t-údar féin a rinne códú agus anailís orthu nó a rinne maoirseacht ar an obair.

Tábla 2.4 Struchtúr an bhunachar sonraí 'An Luath-Thumadh agus na Naíonraí'

	N
Daonáireamh • Líon iomlán na bpáistí i naíonraí, aois, gnéas, teanga bhaile	2,487
Tástálacha ar pháistí • Tástáil sa Ghaeilge: tuiscint, ginchumas agus aithris • Triail ar fhorbairt ghinearálta cognaíoch sa teanga dhúchais • Gráduithe an Stiúrthóra	225
Ceistneoir do Thuismitheoirí • Cumas sa Ghaeilge, caighdeán oideachais, SES, aois • Cúiseanna le naíonra a roghnú, sástacht, riachtanais • Baint le himeachtaí an naíonra, imeachtaí múinte teanga sa bhaile • Dearcadh ar scolaíocht lánGhaelach amach anseo	1,807
Ceistneoir do Stiúrthóirí • Cumas sa Ghaeilge, taithí, cáilíochtaí, freastal ar chúrsaí oiliúna, suíomh an naíonra • Modhanna múinte teanga, an réimse imeachtaí a chuirtear ar fáil • Teagmháil le tuismitheoirí, grúpaí súgartha, scoileanna • Riachtanais agus moltaí	162
Ceistneoir do Stiúrthóirí Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóirí • Cumas sa Ghaeilge, taithí, cáilíochtaí, freastal ar chúrsaí	79
Ceistneoir do Chomhairleoirí • Úsáid na Gaeilge ag Stiúrthóirí • Idirghníomhaíocht le páistí agus le tuismitheoirí • Modhanna múinte teanga, réimse imeachtaí, agus leagan amach • Rátáil fhoriomlán an naíonra	167

Cuireadh suirbhé ar na tuismitheoirí chun a fháil amach cé chomh sásta is a bhíodar leis an naíonra, agus chun a dtuairimí a fháil faoi chumas Gaeilge na bpáistí agus faoin dul chun cinn a bhí á dhéanamh acu i gcoitinne. Fuaireamar eolas uathu, chomh maith, faoin méid Gaeilge a labhair siad féin sa bhaile, faoina gcumas sa Ghaeilge, faoina gcuid scolaíochta, agus faoin gcineál bunscolaíochta a theastaigh uathu dá bpáiste. Samplaíodh 2,487 tuismitheoir agus d'fhreagair 1,807 acu, ráta freagartha 73%, nach mór. Ráta freagartha ard é sin, de réir na gcaighdeán ginearálta, agus thar a bheith ard i gcás

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ceistneora fhéinriartha tríd an bpost. B'fhéidir a rá gurb é is cúis leis sin na tuismitheoirí a bheith gafa le himeachtaí a bhaineann lena bpáistí, chomh maith le spéis na dtuismitheoirí sna naíonraí.

2.2.3 Ceistneoir do Stiúrthóirí

Fuair gach duine den 167 Stiúrthóir a d'fhreagair don Daonáireamh ceistneoir, agus d'fhreagair 162 díobh, is é sin, ráta freagartha 97% de fhreagairt an Daonáirimh. Cuireadh suirbhé ar na Stiúrthóirí maidir lena dtaithí, a gcumas sa Ghaeilge, cáilíochtaí, modhanna, moltaí mar gheall ar na seirbhísí a gcuirtear ar fáil dóibh a fheabhsú, agus an dearcadh a bhí acu faoi rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí agus faoi theagmháil le scoileanna, le naíonraí eile agus le grúpaí súgartha Béarla sa cheantar.

2.2.4 Ceistneoir do Chomhstiúrthóirí/Stiúrthóirí Cúnta

Tugadh foirm do na Stiúrthóirí sin a raibh Comhstiúrthóir/Stiúrthóir Cúnta acu, chun go líonfadh an comhoibrí é. Foirm an-ghairid a bhí inti a dhírigh ar chumas sa Ghaeilge, ar thaithí, ar cháilíochtaí agus ar thinreamh inseirbhíse. Rinne 79 as 90 Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir san iomlán an fhoirm a chomhlánú, freagairt 88%.

2.2.5 Ceistneoir do Chomhairleoirí

Deichniúr Comhairleoirí réigiúnacha a bhí sa Phoblacht (agus duine amháin i dTuaisceart Éireann) i 1993. Tugann Comhairleoirí cuairt rialta ar na naíonraí atá ina gceantar féin, uair in aghaidh na míosa nó mar sin, agus cuireann idir chomhairle agus thacaíocht ar fáil do na Stiúrthóirí. Anuas air sin, cuidíonn siad le naíonraí nua a bhunú agus cuireann agallaimh ar ábhair Stiúrthóirí agus ar ábhair Chomhstiúrthóirí/Stiúrthóirí Cúnta. Déanann siad cigireacht ar áitribh ó thaobh na sábháilteachta de, an líon páistí is mó ar féidir glacadh leo agus maidir le hoiriúnacht an troscáin agus na bhfearas. Labhraíonn Comhairleoirí chomh maith le tuismitheoirí ag na cruinnithe tosaigh agus eagraíonn siad cúrsaí oiliúna inseirbhíse sa cheantar (thart ar uair in aghaidh an téarma).

Chomhlánaigh gach Comhairleoir measúnú ar na naíonraí ina ceantar féin, maidir le riar na naíonraí, a leagan amach agus a n-acmhainní, agus maidir le húsáid teanga, agus scileanna speisialta na Stiúrthóirí aonair, mar shampla. Cuireadh na measúnuithe sin ar bun ar mhaithe leis an taighde seo amháin agus ní bhainfear leas astu ar mhaithe le cuspóir ar bith eile.

2.3 ACHOIMRE

Chuir Daonáireamh naíonraí 1993 achoimre eolais ar fáil faoi athróga cúlra na bpáistí agus iad ag tosú ar naíonra, cuir i gcás a n-aois, cé acu buachaillí nó cailíní iad, agus a gcúlra teanga. Chomh maith leis sin, thug sé léargas ar ghnáthlíon na ndaltaí agus ar na cóimheasa daltaí is múinteoirí a bhí i bhfeidhm. Léiríonn plean an tionscadail an ráta freagartha ó gach earnáil atá bainteach leis na naíonraí agus tugann sé achoimre ar an eolas a bailíodh uathu go léir. Déanfar plé níos mine ar an eolas seo sna caibidlí a leanas.

Caibidil 3

Próifíl na dTuismitheoirí

3.1 RÉAMHRÁ

Is i gcomhar lena chéile a chuireann tuismitheoirí agus múinteoirí oideachas ar pháistí óga. Taispeánadh i dtíortha mar an Chatalóin, Tír na mBascach, An Fhionlainn, Iosrael, an Nua-Shéalainn, Albain agus an Bhreatain Bheag an tábhacht a bhain le tuismitheoirí ó thaobh chláir luath-thumtha a thionscnamh agus ó thaobh úsáid na sprioctheanga a leathnú lasmuigh den naíonra. Sa staidéar seo, measadh é a bheith riachtanach suirbhé a dhéanamh ar thuismitheoirí na bpáistí naíonra chun teacht ar na saintréithe is mó a bhaineann le hábhar i gcás an ghrúpa seo, mar shampla, a stádas socheacnamaíoch, cumas sa Ghaeilge agus a húsáid, agus an taithí a bhí acu féin ar an teanga agus iad ina bpáistí. Sa chaibidil seo pléitear próifíl na dtuismitheoirí de réir mar a tugadh chun solais í sa suirbhé seo. Tugann Mír 3.2 próifíl dhéimeagrafach na bhfreagróirí agus a gcéilí agus sonraíonn Mír 3.3 a gcúlra teanga. Sa deireadh, iniúchtar cumas na dtuismitheoirí sa Ghaeilge i Mír 3.4.

Na Stiúrthóirí a dháil na ceistneoirí ar thuismitheoirí 2,487 páiste naíonra. Bhí leagan Gaeilge agus leagan Béarla den cheistnoir i ngach leabhrán agus litir chumhdaigh sa dá theanga inar iarradh ar dhuine de na tuismitheoirí an fhoirm a chomhlánú. Cóid seachas sloinnte a úsáideadh ar gach foirm chun rúndacht a chinntiú. Cuireadh 1,807 ceistneoir ar ais, ráta freagartha 73% nach mór, ráta atá ar fheabhas, agus a léiríonn spéis agus díograis na dtuismitheoirí sin a chuireann páistí chuig naíonra.

Tá eolas éigin ar fáil ar na neamhfhreagróirí chomh maith, toisc gur cuireadh ceist ar na Stiúrthóirí faoi theanga bhaile na bpáistí i nDaonáireamh na naíonraí. Nuair a cuireadh sonraí na Stiúrthóirí ar theanga bhaile na dtuismitheoirí a d'fhreagair agus na dtuismitheoirí nár fhreagair i gcomparáid le chéile, ba léir gurbh ionann na tuismitheoirí a ghlac páirt sa suirbhé agus grúpa iomlán na dtuismitheoirí naíonra maidir le hathróg thábhachtach theanga an bhaile de. Déanfar roinnt comparáidí thíos idir na saintréithe a bhaineann le tuismitheoirí naíonra agus tuismitheoirí daonraí níos ginearálta sa tír seo. Cuid de na samplaí sin de thuismitheoirí, glacadh iad chun léargas a fháil ar thuismitheoirí uile páistí óga i bPoblacht na hÉireann.

3.2 PRÓIFÍL DHÉIMEAGRAFACH NA bhFREAGRÓIRÍ AGUS NA bPÁIRTITHE

3.2.1 Suíomh

Tríd is tríd, thuairiscigh 24% de na tuismitheoirí naíonra a d'fhreagair an ceistneoir go raibh cónaí orthu sa Ghaeltacht. Cónaíonn thart ar an gceathrú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra i gcathracha, ceathrú eile i mbailte agus thart ar an tríú cuid faoin tuath, agus tá an fuílleach ina gcónaí i sráidbhailte. Is é an chúis is mó go bhfuil ionadaíocht sách ard ag freagróirí tuaithe ná gur faoin tuath, nó i sráidbhaile, atá cónaí ar fhormhór (91%) na bhfreagróirí Gaeltachta. I gceantair an Bhéarla bhí cónaí ar fhormhór na dtuismitheoirí naíonra i gcathair, i mbaile, nó i sráidbhaile (75%).

3.2.2 Gnéas, Aois agus Stádas Pósta

An mháthair a chomhlánaigh an ceistneoir formhór an ama (90%) agus an t-athair a chomhlánaigh an 10% eile. Idir 25 agus 35 bliana a bhí móramh na bhfreagróirí (61%) agus 31% eile idir 36 agus 45 bliana. Bhí 7% níos lú ná 25 bliana d'aois agus gan ach 1% a bhí os cionn 46 bliana. Ar ndóigh, léiríonn an phróifíl aoise gur tuismitheoirí páistí óga iad seo agus a gcéad pháiste faoi chaibidil ag 40% díobh sa cheistneoir seo. Murab ionann agus suirbhéanna teanga eile in Éirinn, CLAR 1973, mar shampla, nó suirbhéanna 1983 nó 1993 an ITÉ, ar samplaí randamacha den daonra iad agus dáileadh aoise níos leithne acu, thosaigh an suirbhé seo le grúpa a bhí teoranta d'aoisbhanda na mblianta giniúna.

Dhearbhaigh 93% de na freagróirí sa cheistneoir tuismitheoirí gur pósta a bhíodar, nó in aontíos le páirtnéir, 5% díobh ina dtuismitheoirí aonair, 2% díobh scartha nó colscartha, agus 0.5% ina mbaintreacha.

3.2.3 Lucht Saothair agus Stádas Gairme

Is féidir stádas saothair na máithreacha, ar 90% de na freagróirí iad, a chur i gcomparáid le stádas na máithreacha sa daonra i gcoitinne agus páiste amháin, ar a laghad, acu in aois a cheithre bliana nó níos óige, rud a sheasann don fho-ghrúpa ábhartha de chuid Shuirbhé ESRI ar Dháileadh Ioncaim, Daonra agus Úsáid na Seirbhísí Stáit, 1987. (Féach Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Hannan & Creighton 1989).

Sa daonra ginearálta de mháithreacha leanaí óga, bíonn thart ar an trí cheathrú cuid gafa le cúramaí an tí, ach níl ach thart ar a leath de mháithreacha naíonra sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht sa chatagóir sin. Baineann ráta níos airde de ghníomhaíocht eacnamaíoch le máithreacha naíonra ná mar a bhaineann leis an daonra i gcoitinne agus seans i bhfad níos mó (45%) iad a bheith ag obair ar phá ná na máithreacha eile (22%). Is oibrithe páirtaimseartha iad thart ar a leath de na máithreacha naíonra atá ag obair ar phá. Cruthú, cuid mhaith, is ea an ráta ard seo de ghníomhaíocht eacnamaíoch ar mheáncháilíochtaí oideachais na mban seo, rud a phléifear go mion sa chéad mhír eile. Is beag difríocht idir máithreacha naíonra sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghalltacht ach beagán beag níos mó máithreacha naíonra Galltachta (46%) a bheith ag obair ar phá ná máithreacha naíonra Gaeltachta (41%).

Iarradh ar na freagróirí cur síos a dhéanamh ar an jab a bhí acu féin agus ag a gcéile tráth an cheistneora, agus tugtar achoimhre ar na sonraí i Tábla 3.1. Iad siúd nach raibh fostaithe ag an am (ina measc iad siúd a bhí i bhfeighil an tí go lánaimseartha agus daoine a bhí dífhostaithe), iarradh orthu cur síos a dhéanamh ar an jab deireanach a bhí acu. De bharr nádúr féinriartha an cheistneora agus an gá a bhí le réamhchódú a dhéanamh ar fhreagraí ar chúinsí costas, b'éigean teorainn a chur leis an rangú gairme a d'fhéadfaí a úsáid. Is féidir comparáid gharbh a dhéanamh, mar sin féin, idir iad agus daonra ginearálta máithreacha agus aithreacha leanaí óga (duine amháin ar a laghad in aois a cheithre bliana nó níos óige), mar a fhaighimid i Suirbhé ESRI (1987) ar Dháileadh Ioncaim, Bochtaineacht agus Úsáid na Seirbhísí Stáit.

Tábla 3.1 Stádas gairme

Gairm	*% Aithreacha an daonra*[1] *N=679*	*% Aithreacha Naíonra*		*% Máithreacha an Daonra*[1] *N=716*	*% Máithreacha Naíonra*	
		Gall. N=1256	*Gael. N=395*		*Gall. N=1352*	*Gael. N=424*
Gairm láimhe	44	32	42	29	21	29
Gairm neamhláimhe	35	46	28	68	73	62
Féinfhostaithe	11	16	18	1	5	6
Feirmeoir	11	6	12	2	1	3
	100[2]	100	100	100	100	100

Na haithreacha agus na máithreacha a roghnaíonn naíonra dá bpáiste, is dóchúla ná a mhalairt iad a bheith féinfhostaithe, i gcomórtas le daonra ginearálta na n-aithreacha agus na máithreacha. Is dóchúla gairm neamhláimhe a bheith ag tuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, i gcomórtas le daonra ginearálta na dtuismitheoirí agus na dtuismitheoirí naíonra Gaeltachta. Chomh maith leis sin, ba lú dóchúlacht gairm láimhe a bheith ag aithreacha agus máithreacha naíonra na Galltachta ná tuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta, nó tuismitheoirí an daonra trí chéile. Tríd is tríd, léiríonn sé seo stádas gairme níos airde ná an meán i measc thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta nuair is cóngaraí do dhaonra ginearálta na dtuismitheoirí iad tuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta, ach amháin leibhéil fhéinfhostaíochta níos airde a bheith acu.

Baineann éifeacht roghnúcháin cuibheasach láidir le catagóirí áirithe gairme neamhláimhe. Mar shampla, chuir thart ar 25% d'aithreacha naíonra agus 10% de mháithreacha síos orthu féin i dtéarmaí ghrúpáil ghairme de mar phroifisiúnaithe/bhainisteoirí, nó ard-státseirbhísigh; cuir sin i gcomórtas le 10% de dhaonra ginearálta na n-aithreacha agus 2% de dhaonra ginearálta na máithreacha. Ar an dul céanna, is múinteoirí thart ar 5% de na haithreacha naíonra agus 9% de na máithreacha naíonra, i gcomórtas le 2% d'aithreacha agus 4% de mháithreacha an daonra ghinearálta[1].

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[1] Foinse: Suirbhé (1987) an ESRI ar Dháileadh Ioncaim, Bochtaineacht agus Úsáid na Seirbhísí Stáit. (Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Hannan and Creighton, 1989)

[2] Níl suimiú na bhfigiúirí cothrom le 100% i ngach cás sa tuarascáil seo, toisc gur uimhreacha slánaithe atá i gceist.

Dhealródh sé gur dócha go gcuirfeadh tuismitheoirí sa Ghalltacht atá sna grúpaí gairme a mbaineann stádas níos airde leo a gcuid páistí chuig naíonra. Ina dhiaidh sin is uile, is ceart a thabhairt faoi deara go mbaineann sciar maith (timpeall an tríú cuid) de pháistí naíonra sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht araon le teaghlaigh a bhfuil an saothraí/na saothraithe iontu ag gabháil de shlí bheatha láimhe.

3.2.4 Gnóthachtáil Oideachasúil

Iarradh ar thuismitheoirí tuairisc a dhéanamh ar cé chomh fada a chuaigh siad féin agus a gcéile tríd an gcóras oideachais. Cuireadh na sonraí sin i gcomparáid leis na figiúirí is déanaí ón daonra ginearálta de thuismitheoirí (le páiste amháin in aois a cheithre bliana nó níos óige). Tugann Tábla 3.2 torthaí na comparáide sin. Níor bheag iad na difríochtaí a bhí idir na tuismitheoirí naíonra agus daonra ginearálta na dtuismitheoirí.

Tábla 3.2 Meastachán ar ghnóthachtáil oideachasúil na dtuismitheoirí naíonra agus thuismitheoirí an daonra

	Aithreacha			*Máithreacha*		
Cé chomh fada is a chuaigh tú ar scoil?	*% Meast. den daonra[1] N=649*	*% Naíonra*		*% Meast. den daonra[1] N=708*	*% Naíonra*	
		Gall N=1215	*Gael N=364*		*Gall N=1296*	*Gael N=392*
Bunscoil	25	5	13	24	5	6
Grúptheastas/Meánteist	34	32	38	25	23	25
Ardteist	22	30	28	36	41	42
Tríú leibhéal (dioplóma/neamhchéim)	7	16	13	8	20	18
Céim ollscoile	7	12	6	5	9	7
Céim mháistir/níos airde	5	5	1	2	2	2
Iomlán	100	100	100	100	100	100

1. Foinse: Táblai speisialta, Suirbhé ESRI (1994) Maireachtáil in Éirinn (Callan, Nolan, Whelan, Whelan & Williams 1996)

Ag díriú ar na máithreacha ar dtús: bhí oideachas tríú leibhéil faighte ag a dhá oiread níos mó de mháithreacha naíonra (30%) ná mar a bhí faighte ag máithreacha an daonra (15%);

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[1] Cé go ndealraíonn sé go bhfuil an difríocht seo beag, tá sé suntasach toisc go mbaineann sé le fo-ghrúpa beag den iomlán.

bhí an Ardteist ag beagáinín níos mó díobh (41%) ná mar a bhí ag máithreacha an daonra (36%); agus ba lú de leath an dóchúlacht go gcríochnódh na máithreacha naíonra lena gcuid oideachais roimh an Ardteist, i gcomórtas le máithreacha an daonra ghinearálta (29% i gcoinne 49%).

Ba é an dála céanna é i gcás na n-aithreacha. Bhí oideachas tríú leibhéil faighte ag beagnach dhá oiread na n-aithreacha naíonra (30%) is a bhí ag aithreacha an daonra (19%), an Ardteist ag beagáinín níos mó aithreacha naíonra (29%) i gcomórtas le haithreacha an daonra (22%), agus níos lú aithreacha naíonra a raibh cáilíochtaí níos ísle ná an Ardteist acu (40%) i gcomórtas le haithreacha an daonra (59%).

Is beag bídeach an difríocht a bhí idir próifíl oideachasúil na máithreacha naíonra sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht agus an Ardteist, ar a laghad, ag a bhformhór acu. Bhí roinnt difríochtaí idir na haithreacha, agus a leath níos mó arís d'aithreacha naíonra na Galltachta (33%) a raibh cáilíochtaí tríú leibhéil acu, i gcomórtas le haithreacha naíonra na Gaeltachta (20%), agus beagán níos mó d'aithreacha naíonra na Gaeltachta (51%) a raibh cáilíochtaí faoi bhun na hArdteiste acu, i gcomórtas le haithreacha naíonra na Galltachta (37%). Ba chomhchosúil lena chéile, áfach, céatadán na n-aithreacha naíonra sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht a raibh an Ardteist déanta acu, thart ar 29%, beagáinín níos airde ná an 22% d'aithreacha an daonra a bhain an Ardteist amháin amach.

Dhealródh sé mar sin gur líonmhaire go maith iad na tuismitheoirí a bhfuil ardoideachas orthu a roghnaíonn naíonra dá bpáistí ná tuismitheoirí leanaí réamhscoile an daonra i gcoitinne. Mar sin féin, caithfear a rá go soiléir nach scothaicme aonchineálach a bhfuil oideachas orthu iad na tuismitheoirí Galltachta a roghnaíonn naíonra, ós rud é go bhfuil breis is an tríú cuid d'aithreacha naíonra na Galltachta, a leath d'aithreacha naíonra na Gaeltachta agus beagnach an tríú cuid de mháithreacha naíonra sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghalltacht araon a d'fhág an scoil roimh an Ardteist.

3.3 CÚLRA TEANGA NA dTUISMITHEOIRÍ

Iarradh ar na freagróirí cur síos ar an gcúlra teanga a bhí acu féin agus ag a gcéile sa chás cuí. Is de theaghlaigh nár labhraíodh an Ghaeilge riamh iontu formhór (68%) thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta. Mar chomparáid, úsáideadh suirbhé ITÉ (1993)[1] mar mheastachán ar chúlra teanga an daonra agus taispeánadh go raibh cúlra Béarla amháin ag níos mó díobh siúd, ag 91%. Taispeánann sin go raibh claonadh i dtreo na Gaeilge ag níos mó de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta óna gcúlra féin, ná mar a bhí sa daonra ginearálta den aoisghrúpa faoi 45 bliana. Ach mar sin féin, bhí móramh thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta gan cúlra Gaeilge speisialta ó bhaile acu.

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[1] Úsáideadh ceist eile sa suirbhé seo ar mhinicíocht úsáid na Gaeilge idir thuismitheoirí an fhreagróra, idir an athair agus an freagróir, an mháthair agus an freagróir, agus idir na deartháireacha/deirfiúreacha agus an freagróir. Bhí na freagraí ar gach leibhéal an-chosúil go deo le chéile, agus sa chomparáid seo baintear úsáid as na torthaí ar mhinicíocht úsáid na Gaeilge idir thuismitheoirí an fhreagróra agus é/í ag fás aníos.

Ar an taobh eile den scéal, ní raibh ann ach mionlach i measc thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta (34%) de theaghlaigh nár labhraíodh an Ghaeilge riamh iontu agus iad ag éirí aníos. Léiríonn sé seo arís an éagsúlacht a fhaightear laistigh de dhaonra na dtuismitheoirí naíonra agus níos mó ná a leath acu (59%) san iomlán, ar de theaghlaigh iad nár labhraíodh Gaeilge ar bith iontu.

D'éirigh beagnach a leath (42%) de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta (máithreacha agus aithreacha) aníos i dteaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge iontu 'de ghnáth' nó 'go minic'. Bhí 24% eile i measc thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta de theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge 'ó am go ham'. Ní raibh ach 6% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta a d'éirigh aníos i dteaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge 'de ghnáth' nó 'go minic', agus 26% i dteaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge 'ó am go ham'.

Is fiú a mheabhrú gur thuairiscigh 30% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta gurbh í an Ghaeilge a d'úsáidtí 'de ghnáth' sa bhaile agus iad ag éirí aníos ach tugann na sonraí a chuirtear ar fáil sa chéad chaibidil eile le fios nach raibh ach 22% den ghrúpa seo a labhair an Ghaeilge amháin lena bpáistí féin. Caithfear a rá go soiléir nach mór a bheith aireach agus ciall á baint as an difríocht seo, sa mhéid nárbh ionann iad an dá chatagóir a úsáideadh - 'an Ghaeilge á labhairt de ghnáth i do theachsa (agus tú ag eirú aníos)' agus 'Gaeilge amháin á labhairt leis an bpáiste seo agus é/í ina naíonán'. Mar sin féin, d'fhéadfadh gur fianaise bhreise é seo ar shleamhnú idirghlúine ó thaobh úsáid na Gaeilge i dteaghlaigh Ghaeltachta de.

3.3.1 An Meán Teagaisc i Scoileanna na dTuismitheoirí

Iarradh ar na tuismitheoirí naíonra eolas a thabhairt ar an meán teagaisc a úsáideadh agus iad ar scoil, agus tugtar na torthaí i dTábla 3.3. Úsáidtear sonraí ó shuirbhé ITÉ (1993) mar chomparáid, le figiúirí ó na freagróirí a bhí faoi 45 bliana d'aois, ar aon dul le haoisghrúpa na dtuismitheoirí naíonra. Léiríonn Tábla 3.3 nach raibh ann ach mionlach de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta (5%) agus a gcomh-aoisghrúpa (4%) ó shuirbhé ITÉ (1993) a d'fhreastail ar bhunscoil lánGhaeilge agus 11% agus 7%, faoi seach, a d'fhreastail ar bhunscoil páirtGhaeilge. Ba mar an gcéanna an scéal leis an iar-bhunscolaíocht. Arís, ba mhionlach de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta agus de fhreagróirí shuirbhé ITÉ a d'fhreastail ar iarbhunscoil lánGhaeilge nó páirtGhaeilge. Taispeánann an chomparáid seo nach raibh leibhéal oideachais lánGhaeilge níos airde ag tuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta ná mar a bhí ag a bpiaraí sa daonra i gcoitinne.

Ar an taobh eile den scéal, ba mhóramh iad tuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta a d'fhreastail ar bhunscoil lánGhaeilge (54%) agus ar iar-bhunscoil lánGhaeilge (43%). Mar sin féin, bhí bunscolaíocht trí mhéan an Bhéarla ag 32% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta, agus meánscolaíocht trí Bhéarla ag 44% díobh.

Maidir le mianta na dtuismitheoirí naíonra Gaeltachta i leith a bpáistí, theastaigh oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge ón móramh, beag beann ar a dtaithí scoile féin, agus is é sin 68% i gcás leibhéal na bunscoile. Tá sleamhnú éigin i dtreo na scolaíochta páirtGhaeilge i gcás na hiar-bhunscoile, agus 52% á lorg dá bpáistí. Mar sin féin, níor theastaigh iar-bhunscoil trí mheán an Bhéarla ach ó 17% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta.

Tábla 3.3 Cineál scoile na dtuismitheoirí féin agus an scoil ar theastaigh uathu dá bpáistí naíonra

Cineál Bunscoile	*% ITÉ 1993*[1]	*% na dTuismitheoiri Naionra*[2]		*%*[3] *Mian na dTuis. naionra dá bpáisti féin*	
		Gall.	*Gael.*	*Gall.*	*Gael.*
	N=526	*N=2462*	*N=706*	*N=1284*	*N=367*
Lán-Ghaeilge nó Gaeltacht	4	5	54	39	68
Páirt-Ghaeilge (níos mó ná 1 ábhar)	7	11	13	26	25
Gnáthscoil náisiúnta (Gaeilge mar ábhar amháin)	88	84	32	35	8
Iomlán	100	100	100	100	100
Cineál Meánscoile	*N=526*	*N=2462*	*N=706*	*N=1284*	*N=367*
Lán-Ghaeilge nó Gaeltacht	4	5	43	25	52
Páirt-Ghaeilge (níos mó ná 1 ábhar)	5	9	13	33	31
Gnáthscoil (Gaeilge mar ábhar)	90	86	44	42	17
Iomlán	100	100	100	100	100

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1. Baineann figiúirí ITÉ (1993) le freagróirí faoi bhun 45 bliana, chun próifíl na dtuismitheoirí naíonra a mheaitseáil. 526 freagróir san aoisghrúpa sin a bhí i suirbhé an ITÉ (1993), ar 53.9% den sampla iomlán iad. Ar mhaithe le comparáid, dáiltear go comhréireach iad daoine nach mbaineann le hábhar nó atá ar iarraidh. Foinse: Tábla speisialta, bunaithe ar shuirbhé náisiúnta ITÉ 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994).
2. Cumasctar sonraí ar fhreagróirí agus a gcéile anseo, ar mhaithe le comparáid le sampla déghnéasach ITÉ.
3. Tagraíonn na céatadáin a léirítear sa tábla do na freagraí bailí (uimhreacha slánaithe) ar gach ceist.

I measc thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, theastaigh scolaíocht lánGhaeilge ó dhá chúigiú díobh (39%), nó bunscolaíocht pháirtGhaeilge ón gceathrú cuid díobh (26%). Ní raibh ach an tríú cuid ar theastaigh uathu a bpáistí a chur chuig gnáth-bhunscoil náisiúnta. Fágann sin go raibh beagnach a hocht n-oiread níos mó de na tuismitheoirí naíonra Galltachta a raibh taithí acu féin ar bhunscoil lánGhaeilge ar theastaigh uathu a bpáistí féin a chur chuig scoil mar í. I gcás na meánscolaíochta de bhí sleamhnú arís le feiceáil, ach theastaigh meánscoil lánGhaeilge ó 25% de thuismitheoiri naíonra na Galltachta dá bpáistí, agus meánscoil pháirtGhaeilge ó 33% díobh.

Ní i gcónaí a bhíonn teacht ar scoil lánGhaeilge. Tríd is tríd, dúirt 68% de na freagróirí go raibh teacht acu ar bhunscoil lánGhaeilge, 80% a thug le fios gur suas le dhá mhíle uathu a bhí sí, 15% a thuairiscigh gur idir trí agus sé mhíle uathu a bhí scoil mar í, agus mionlach a dúirt gur suas le 26 míle uathu a bhí sí.

3.4 CUMAS GAEILGE NA dTUISMITHEOIRÍ

Iarradh ar thuismitheoirí measúnú a dhéanamh ar a gcumas féin agus ar chumas a gcéile i labhairt, i dtuiscint, i scríobh agus i léamh na Gaeilge. Tugann Tábla 3.4 na torthaí a bhaineann le labhairt na Gaeilge. Is díol spéise é comparáid a dhéanamh idir na torthaí a bhain le cuid de na ceisteanna seo agus na freagraí ó shampla ginearálta aosach i suirbhé ITÉ 1993 ar cheist mar í (Ó Riagáin agus Ó Gliasáin 1994).

Tábla 3.4 Cumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí (céatadán bailí)

Labhairt na Gaeilge	*% Tuismitheoirí Galltachta*[1] *N=2563*	*% Tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta*[1] *N=744*	*% ITÉ 1993*[2] *N=526*
Gaeilge ar bith[3]	5	2	10
Cúpla focal	19	9	27
Abairtí Simplí	21	9	22
Codanna de chomhráite	37	22	27
An chuid is mó de chomhráite	11	25	11
Gach comhrá	6	32	2
	100	100	100

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1. Tá na sonraí ó mháithreacha agus aithreacha curtha le chéile anseo.
2. Baineann figiúirí ITÉ (1993) le freagróirí faoi bhun 45 bliana, chun próifíl na dtuismitheoirí naíonra a mheaitseáil. 526 freagróir san aoisghrúpa sin a bhí i suirbhé an ITÉ (1993), ar 53.9% den sampla iomlán iad. Ar mhaithe le comparáid, dáiltear go comhréireach iad daoine nach mbaineann le hábhar nó atá ar iarraidh. Foinse: Tábla speisialta, bunaithe ar shuirbhé náisiúnta an ITÉ 1993 (Ó Riagáin & Ó Gliasáin, 1994).
3. Thug Ó Riagáin (1992:51) 'cumas lag nó gan chumas sa Ghaeilge' ar an chéad cheithre phointe dá scála, a bhí cosúil leis an scála seo. Sa díospóireacht seo, tugtar 'cumas lag' at phointe 1-3 agus 'cumas lagmheasartha' ar phointe 4 (codanna de chomhráite). Mar an gcéánna le Ó Riagáin, tugtar 'cumas measartha' ar phointe 5 agus 'ardchumas/líofacht' ar phointe 6.

Taispeánann Tábla 3.4 go bhfuil tuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta cosúil go leor lena gcomh-aoisghrúpa i suirbhé ITÉ maidir lena gcumas sa Ghaeilge. Bhí céadatán suntasach níos airde de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta (6%) ag an leibhéal is airde i labhairt na Gaeilge ná mar a bhí i measc shampla ITÉ (2%), agus bhí céatadán níos airde (37%) díobh chomh maith le cumas lagmheasartha ('codanna de chomhráite') ná mar a bhí i sampla ITÉ (27%). Bhí 45% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta ag leibhéal cumais an-íseal nó gan Gaeilge ar bith, i gcomparáid le 59% de shuirbhé ITÉ. Ach tríd is tríd, bhí thart ar cheithre chúigiú den dá ghrúpa agus cumas lagmheasartha nó lag ar a mhéad acu, agus gan ach an cúigiú cuid a raibh cumas measartha nó ardchumas sa Ghaeilge acu i measc thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, agus níos lú ná an séú cuid de shampla ITÉ ag an dá leibhéal cumais is airde.

Bhí ardchumas sa Ghaeilge ag an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta, agus cumas measartha ag an gceathrú cuid eile. Fágann sin go raibh cumas lagmheasartha nó cumas lag ag 42% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta.

Tríd is tríd, dhealródh sé gur dóchúla go mbeadh ardchumas ag tuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta ná mar a bheadh i measc sampla den aoisghrúpa céanna i suirbhé ITÉ, ach fós nach bhfuil ann ach mionlach beag sa dá chás. Caithfear a mheabhrú gur thuairiscigh beagnach a leath de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta nach raibh ach cumas an-íseal acu sa teanga, ag bunphointí den scála, agus cumas lag acu sa teanga ar a mhéad. Léiríonn sé sin gur dóigh le tuismitheoirí sa Ghalltacht nach cainteoirí líofa Gaeilge iad féin fiú, gur rud fónta dá bpáistí é freastal ar naíonra.

3.5 CONCLÚIDÍ

Léiríonn an phróifíl dhéimeagrafach gur éagsúil mar ghrúpa iad tuismitheoirí naíonra le grúpa sa daonra ginearálta atá inchomórtais leo maidir le gnóthachtáil oideachasúil, stádas i measc an lucht saothair agus gairm. Cé go dtugann sé sin le fios go mbaineann siad siúd a bhfuil oideachas níos fearr orthu agus teacht isteach níos mó acu leas níos mó as an soláthar naíonra, caithfear a mheabhrú go bhfuil codán nach beag de thuismitheoirí naíonra (an tríú cuid go garbh) nach bhfuil ach leibhéil ísle oideachais bainte amach acu, a d'fhág an scoil roimh an Ardteistiméireacht agus atá ag plé le jabanna láimhe.

Sa tslí chéanna, cé go bhfuil ardleibhéil chumais sa Ghaeilge ag céatadán níos airde na dtuismitheoirí naíonra ná mar atá ag an daonra ginearálta, fós féin thuairiscigh breis is 80% de fhreagróirí na Galltachta agus 40% de fhreagróirí na Gaeltachta nach raibh acu ach Gaeilge lag nó lagmheasartha. De bharr an mheascáin sin, is deacair cur síos ar an ngnáth-thuismitheoir naíonra sa Ghalltacht nó sa Ghaeltacht i dtéarmaí gairme, i dtéarmaí ghnóthachtáil oideachais agus chumas sa Ghaeilge de. Is fíor gur grúpa faoi leith iad tuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta ach go háirithe, i gcomparáid lena gcomhaoisghrúpa, ach tá difríochtaí móra laistigh den ghrúpa a thaispeánann nach scothaicme aonchineálach iad.

Caibidil 4

Na Tuismitheoirí agus na Naíonraí

4.1 RÉAMHRÁ

Thug Ó Murchú (1987:20) faoi deara a lárnaí is a bhí ról na dtuismitheoirí san oideachas réamhbhunscoile i dteangacha neamhfhorleathana ós iad 'an fórsa spreagtha, tionscnaimh agus tiomána iad'. Dearbhaítear sa litríocht tábhacht ról na dtuismitheoirí sa réamhscolaíocht i gcás páistí atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste (féach Hohmann et al 1979). Tugann an taighde le fios, chomh maith, páirt ríthábhachtach a bheith ag tuismitheoirí san oideachas luath-thumtha (Ó Murchú 1987, Lyon agus Ellis 1991, Lyon, 1996 agus van der Goot *et al.* 1994). Is ról é seo, áfach, nach dtuigeann na tuismitheoirí féin a luach i gcónaí, agus creideann a lán acu gur sa naíonra amháin a tharlaíonn an 'obair cheart' a bhaineann le foghlaim teanga agus gur chabair phraiticiúil is mó a chuirfidh siad féin ar fáil. Sa chaibidil seo, tuairiscítear ar na cúiseanna a bhí ag tuismitheoirí chun naíonra a roghnú, agus ar a gcuid tuairimí faoin dul chun cinn atá á dhéanamh ag na páistí agus cé chomh sásta is atá siad. Déantar cur síos, leis, ar cé chomh gafa is atá na tuismitheoirí leis an naíonra agus ar an úsáid a bhaineann siad as an nGaeilge ag baile.

4.2 CÚISEANNA LE NAÍONRA A ROGHNÚ

Fiafraíodh de na tuismitheoirí cé na fachtóirí a chuaigh i bhfeidhm orthu nuair a chinneadar ar a bpáiste a chur ar naíonra. Thug an cheist deis do fhreagróirí go leor cúiseanna a roghnú (mar sin ní fhaightear 100% nuair a chuirtear na huimhreacha le chéile). I dTábla 4.1 rangaítear na fachtóirí de réir minicíochta, agus tugtar céatadán na dtuismitheoirí a luaigh na roghanna sin.

An chúis ba mhinice a luadh chun páiste a chur ar naíonra ná gur theastaigh ó na tuismitheoirí go bhfoghlaimeodh an páiste an Ghaeilge. Follasach go leor, a déarfá, ach is léiriú é go gcreideann na tuismitheoirí go gcuideodh freastal ar naíonra ar bhealach suntasach lena bpáistí an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim. An dara cúis ba mhinice ná cáil ghinearálta naíonra nó Stiúrthóra áirithe, rud a léiríonn má bhíonn an dea-scéal amuigh go gcuidíonn sé sin go mór le cur chun cinn an naíonra.

Ba dhíol spéise é nach raibh ach an triú cuid de na tuismitheoirí a dúirt gur theastaigh uathu a bpáiste a chur ar bhunscoil lánGhaelach ar ball mar chúis amháin lena gcur ar naíonra. Dá réir sin, d'fhéadfadh go síleann tuismitheoirí gur tairbhe inti féin í taithí a

Tábla 4.1 Cúiseanna le páistí a chur ar naíonra

Cúiseanna a roghnaíodh[1]	*% Freagróirí*[2] *N=1807*
Theastaigh uathu go bhfoghlaimeodh an páiste an Ghaeilge (T)	68
Cáil an Stiúrthóra/an naíonra áitiúil (N/O)	59
Theastaigh uathu go bhfreastalódh an páiste ar scoil lánGhaeilge ar ball (T)	33
An t-aon réamhscoil/an réamhscoil ba ghaire dóibh sa cheantar (N/O)	32
Áiseanna maithe ag an naíonra (N/O)	30
D'fhreastail tuismitheoir/siblín ar naíonra/AIS (T)	27
Cara a mhol go hard é (N/O)	26
Méid áirithe Gaeilge ag an bpáiste sa bhaile (T)	5
Cainteoir dúchais Gaeilge é an páiste (T)	4

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1. Seasann (T) agus (N/O) do chúiseanna teanga agus neamhtheanga/oideachais faoi seach, rangú a úsáidtear i roinnt anailísí eile ar ball.
2. Thug an cheist deis do fhreagróirí cúiseanna éagsúla a roghnú agus dá réir sin ní fhaightear 100% nuair a chuirtear na huimhreacha le chéile.

bheith ag an bpáiste ar an nGaeilge sa naíonra agus nach gá go mbeadh sé ar intinn acu é a chur ar aghaidh chuig scoil thumtha lánGhaeilge. Seans nach raibh a n-aigne déanta suas acu nuair a roghnaíodar an naíonra, nó nach raibh an rogha sin ar fáil acu.

Rangaigh Ó Riagáin agus Ó Gliasáin (1979) na cúiseanna a bhí ag tuismitheoirí le scoil lánGhaeilge a roghnú ina dtrí chatagóir: 'cúiseanna teanga amháin', 'cúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais' agus 'an dá shaghas cúise'. Fuaireadar amach gur ar chúiseanna teanga amháin a roghnaigh thart ar an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí bunscoileanna lánGhaeilge, trian eile ar chúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais agus an fuílleach ar chúis ar mheascadh den dá chineál í.

Rinneadh an rud céanna leis na freagraí ar an gceist seo sa suirbhé ar naíonraí nuair a rangaíodh ina 'gcúiseanna teanga' iad na fachtóirí a bhfuil (T) ina ndiaidh i dTábla 4.1 agus ina 'gcúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais' iad siúd a bhfuil (N/O) ina ndiaidh. Tugtar torthaí an rangaithe sin i Tábla 4.2. Tríd is tríd, dealraíonn sé gur roghnaigh formhór (62%) na dtuismitheoirí a bpáiste a chur ar naíonra ar chúiseanna ar mheascadh iad de chúiseanna teanga agus neamhtheanga/oideachais. Roghnaigh beagnach an cúigiú cuid naíonra ar chúiseanna neamhtheanga amháin, mar shampla é a bheith áisiúil, áiseanna maithe a bheith aige agus dea-cháil i gcoitinne a bheith air. Roghnaigh thart ar an gcúigiú cuid de fhreagróirí na Galltachta naíonra ar chúiseanna teanga amháin, ach is lú ná sin líon na bhfreagróirí Gaeltachta a rinne rogha ar chúiseanna teanga amháin. B'airde an céatadán díobh siúd a raibh a gcinneadh bunaithe ar mheascán de chúiseanna teanga agus neamhtheanga araon sa suirbhé ar na naíonraí ná i suirbhé an Riagáinaigh

Table 4.2 Catagórú ar na cúiseanna le naíonra a roghnú

Cúiseanna	% *Galltacht* *N=1354*	% *Gaeltacht* *N=425*	% *Iomlán* *N=1779*
Cúiseanna teanga amháin	21	12	19
Cúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais	18	19	18
An dá shaghas cúise	60	68	63
Iomlán[1]	100	100	100

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[1] Nil suimiú na bhfigiúiri cothrom le 100% toisc gur uimhreacha slánaithe iad.

agus an Ghliasánaigh ar thuismitheoirí na scoileanna lánGhaeilge. D'fhéadfadh gurb é is brí leis sin ná gur dócha go mbeadh cúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais ag daoine a roghnaíonn réamhoideachas neamhéigeantach murab ionann agus an próiseas beartaíochta a bhaineann le scoil amháin seachas a chéile sa chóras scolaíochta éigeantach a roghnú.

4.3 LEIBHÉAL SÁSTACHTA NA dTUISMITHEOIRÍ

Bhí tuismitheoirí thar a bheith sásta ar fad gur roghnaigh siad naíonra: thuairiscigh 96% díobh go ndéanfadh siad an rud céanna arís, sa naíonra céanna. Dúirt 3% eile go roghnódh siad an naíonra céanna ach go bhfanfadh siad go mbeadh an páiste níos sine. Ní raibh ach 1% a dúirt go mb'fhearr leo a bpáiste a chur chuig grúpa súgartha Béarla. San iomlán, bhraith 96% de na freagróirí gur bhain a bpáiste sult as an naíonra. Ní raibh difríocht shuntasach ar bith idir tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta agus tuismitheoirí na Galltachta maidir le sásamh de ach go raibh beagáinín níos mó de thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta (5%) a dúirt go roghnódh siad an naíonra céanna, ach go bhfanfadh siad go mbeadh an páiste níos sine ná de thuismitheoirí na Galltachta a bhraith amhlaidh (2%).

Iarradh ar na tuismitheoirí a chur in iúl cén tuairim a bhí ag an bpáiste den naíonra. Arís, ní raibh aon difríocht shuntasach idir na tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta agus na tuismitheoirí Galltachta, agus san iomlán thuairiscigh 92% gur bhain an páiste taitneamh as. Dúirt 7% go raibh mearbhall ar an bpáiste i dtosach ach gur shocraigh siad síos ar ball. Ní raibh ach 1.5% a thuairiscigh a bpáiste a bheith 'ag streachailt i gcónaí agus drogall air dul ann ar uairibh' agus 0.5% go raibh a bpáiste 'an-mhíshona agus drogall i gcónaí air dul ann'.

Thuairiscigh 92% de thuismitheoirí méadú ar an úsáid a bhain a bpáiste as an nGaeilge tar éis dhá théarma, ar a laghad, a chaitheamh sa naíonra (7% gan athrú ar bith agus 1% a thuairiscigh laghdú). Orthu siúd a thuairiscigh méadú, dúirt beagnach 60% gur focail aonair a bhí ansin, nó rainn agus amhráin a d'úsáid an páiste 'go rialta' sa bhaile, agus dúirt 25% eile gur úsáideadh iad sin 'uaireanta'. Bhí seans níos mó go dtuairisceodh tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta méadú ar chomhrá rialta sa Ghaeilge ón bpáiste (19%) tar éis tréimhse sa naíonra ná tuismitheoirí Galltachta (5%).

Bhraith na tuismitheoirí nach raibh dul chun cinn an pháiste teoranta do shealbhú na Gaeilge ná do mhéadú ar úsáid na Gaeilge. Thuairiscigh breis is 80% go raibh a bpáiste:

- in ann dathanna, cruthanna agus litreacha áirithe a aithint anois
- in ann comhaireamh níos airde ná mar a bhí cheana
- in ann rainn agus amhráin Ghaeilge a rá anois

Dúirt 56% go raibh feabhas, leis, ar scileanna Béarla an pháiste nuair nár bhraith ach 1% go raibh Béarla T1 an pháiste níos laige ná Béarla a phiaraí.

4.4 CÚLRA TEANGA AN PHÁISTE

Thuairiscigh na tuismitheoirí an teanga a labhair siad leis an bpáiste agus 'é ina leanbh agus ina thachrán' agus cuirtear na sonraí sin i láthair i dTábla 4.3.

Tábla 4.3 Teanga bhaile an pháiste

Teanga bhaile	*% Galltacht N=1351*	*% Gaeltacht N=424*	*% Iomlán N=1775*
Béarla amháin	84	36	73
Béarla agus Gaeilge	15	41	21
Gaeilge amháin	1	22	6
Eile	1	1	1
	100	100	100

Sa Ghalltacht, bhain formhór na bpáistí le teaghlaigh Bhéarla. Mar sin féin, bhí céatadán suimiúl (15%) de na tuismitheoirí sin a d'fhreagair go raibh a dteaghlach dátheangach, ach ní fios go cruinn cé mhéad Gaeilge a úsáidtear sna teaghlaigh sin. Ní raibh ach 1% de thuismitheoirí naíonra sa Ghalltacht a thuairiscigh gur labhair siad Gaeilge amháin lena leanaí.

Léiríonn na figiúirí a bhaineann le teanga an bhaile sa Ghaeltacht gur 'Gaeilge amháin' a labhair níos lú ná an ceathrú cuid de thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta lena bpáiste. Thuairiscigh céatadán ard (41%) de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta gur teaghlaigh dhátheangacha a bhí acu, agus níos mó ná an tríú cuid gur Béarla amháin a labhair siad lena bpáiste agus é ina thachrán. Tagann sé sin le fiosrú Harris agus Murtagh (1987) ar pháistí Gaeltachta níos sine agus a gcumas sa Ghaeilge. Fuair siad amach nach raibh ach 20% de pháistí Rang a Dó na Gaeltachta ar de 'theaghlaigh Ghaeilge amháin' iad, gur de 'theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh Béarla agus Gaeilge' iad 34% agus gur de 'theaghlaigh Bhéarla amháin' iad 46% díobh. Mar sin, i measc aoisghrúpa an naíonra agus i measc páistí níos sine sa Ghaeltacht ní raibh ach mionlach díobh ar de theaghlach lánGhaeilge iad.

I gceist eile iarradh ar na tuismitheoirí measúnú a dhéanamh ar eolas an pháiste ar an nGaeilge roimh freastal ar an naíonra dó. Achoimre ar a bhfreagraí atá i dTábla 4.4. Bhain 72% de pháistí naíonra na Galltachta leis na catagóirí 'Gaeilge ar bith' nó 'gan ach tuiscint ar éigean di'. Bhí 'corrfhocal agus cornath' sa Ghaeilge ag 26% eile roimh thosú ar naíonra. Is é sin le rá go raibh 98% san iomlán de pháistí na Galltachta agus cumas lag acu sa Ghaeilge, má bhí an méid sin féin, roimh thosú sa naíonra dóibh.

Tábla 4.4 Eolas na bpáistí ar an nGaeilge roimh dhul ar naíonra:
Measúnú na dtuismitheoirí

Cé mhéad Gaeilge a bhí ar eolas ag do pháiste SULAR thosaigh sé sa naíonra ?	*% Galltacht N=1350*	*% Gaeltacht N=416*
Gaeilge ar bith	67	25
Gan ach tuiscint ar éigean di	5	15
Corrfhocal/cornath sa Ghaeilge	26	30
In ann comhrá a dhéanamh sa Ghaeilge	0.5	2
Gaeilge chomh maith leis an mBéarla/níos fearr	1	16
Gaeilge amháin ag an bpáiste	0.5	12
Iomlán	100	100

I gcás páistí naíonra na Gaeltachta, tuairiscíodh go raibh 40% díobh gan Ghaeilge, nó tuiscint áirithe di ar a mhéad acu agus iad ag tosú sa naíonra, agus 30% eile gan acu ach corrfhocal nó cornath. Is é sin le rá go raibh 70% san iomlán de pháistí naíonra na Gaeltachta agus cumas lag sa Ghaeilge ó bhaile acu, má bhí an méid sin féin. Thuairiscigh 30% eile de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta go raibh a bpáiste in ann comhrá a dhéanamh sa Ghaeilge, ar a laghad, agus é ag tosú sa naíonra.

Léirigh crostábluithe leis an gceist a bhain leis an teanga a labhraítear leis an bpáiste go raibh 68% den ghrúpa tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta nach raibh 'Gaeilge ar bith' ag a bpáiste, nó gan ach 'tuiscint áirithe di' aige sular cuireadh ar naíonra é, a labhair 'Béarla amháin' leis an bpáiste agus é ina leanbh nó ina thachrán, agus 28% eile a labhair 'Béarla agus Gaeilge' leis. Formhór an ghrúpa eile, ba theanga eile í seachas Gaeilge nó Béarla. Dúirt 67% de thuismitheoirí Gaeltachta na bpáistí sin nach raibh acu, ar a mhéad, ach 'corrfhocal nó cornath sa Ghaeilge' gur 'Béarla agus Gaeilge' a labhair siad leis an bpáiste (agus 30% eile nár labhair ach 'Béarla amháin' leo) ach, nuair a fhéachtar ar an leibhéal cumais sa Ghaeilge a bhí mar thoradh air sin, dhealródh sé gurb é an Béarla a bhí in uachtar sna teaghlaigh dhátheangacha sin.

Ní mór a mheabhrú nár thuairiscigh ach 22% de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta 'Gaeilge amháin' a bheith á labhairt sa bhaile agus an páiste an-óg. Mar a léirigh Ní Dhorchaí (1986:38), d'fhéadfadh fachtóirí éagsúla a bheith laistiar de sin, mar shampla, drogall ar thuismitheoirí arb í an Ghaeilge an teanga bhaile acu páiste a chur ar naíonra; nó gan teacht ar naíonra ag páistí ó theaghlach Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht, nó an éifeacht a bhíonn ag inimirceoirí gan Ghaeilge ag teacht isteach agus cainteoirí Gaeilge na Gaeltachta ar imirce amach. Caithfear a rá nach gá go seasfadh sampla thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta sa staidéar seo do gach teaghlach Gaeltachta a bhfuil páistí óga ann agus gur féidir, abair, gur Gaeilge seachas Béarla a bheadh á labhairt ag go leor teaghlach Gaeltachta nach mbaineann leas as an naíonra.

Mar chomparáid, is fiú figiúirí an Daonáirimh Náisiúnta a scrúdú. Thaispeáin an Daonáireamh go raibh 2,786 páiste idir trí agus ceithre bliana d'aois sa Ghaeltacht i 1991. Ina measc siúd, tuairiscíodh go raibh 40% in ann 'Gaeilge amháin' nó 'Gaeilge agus Béarla' a labhairt. Is gá a bheith cúramach agus an figiúr seo á chur i gcomparáid leis na figiúirí sa staidéar seo, toisc gur úsáideadh ceisteanna éagsúla i gcás na dtuismitheoirí, na Stiúrthóirí agus na daoine a d'fhreagair an Daonáireamh, agus toisc nach raibh aoisghrúpa díreach mar an gcéanna i gceist ach chomh beag. Ach mar sin féin, is féidir comparáid éigin a dhéanamh idir bhreithiúnas an Daonáirimh Náisiúnta gur 'cainteoirí Gaeilge' nó 'cainteoirí Gaeilge agus Béarla' iad 40% de na páistí, agus measúnú na Stiúrthóirí (sa daonáireamh naíonra) go raibh 'cumas maith' nó 'cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas' ag 41% de na páistí tar éis dóibh timpeall dhá théarma a chaitheamh sa naíonra.[1] Ciallaíonn sin go dtugann sampla na bpáistí sa staidéar seo léargas réasúnta beacht den aoisghrúpa seo sa Ghaeltacht, maidir lena gcumas sa Ghaeilge, ar choinníoll go nglactar leis go bhfuil comparáid á dhéanamh idir cheisteanna agus idir ghrúpaí nach bhfuil díreach mar an gcéanna.

Ón daonáireamh naíonra tá a fhios againn go raibh 625 páiste, an formhór díobh idir trí agus ceithre bliana, ag freastal ar naíonra sa Ghaeltacht i 1993. Fágann sin go raibh níos lú ná an ceathrú cuid den aoisghrúpa sin ag freastal ar naíonra sa Ghaeltacht, agus go raibh níos mó ná 2,000 páiste réamhscoile sa Ghaeltacht nach raibh ag freastal ar naíonra. Ina measc siúd, bheadh garmheastachán de 1,200-1,400 páiste nach raibh aon Ghaeilge acu, nó, ar an gcuid is fearr de, Gaeilge an-lag acu, agus 600-800 páiste eile a bhí ina gcainteoirí Gaeilge. Seans go dtaispeánann sin an deacracht a bhaineann le seirbhís réamhscoile a sholáthar faoin tuath, áit a mbíonn páistí óga scaipthe i dtithe i bhfad ó chéile, gan trácht ar na deacrachtaí a bhaineann le foireann agus suíomh a fháil. Mar sin féin, is léir gur fiú díriú ar bhealaí chun teacht ar an ngrúpa seo, chun eolas éigin ar an nGaeilge a thabhairt do na leanaí sa Ghaeltacht nach bhfuil ach Béarla acu sa bhaile, chun saibhreas teanga a chothú i measc na nGaeilgeoirí, agus chun réamhscolaíocht a sholáthar don dá dhream.

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[1] Ceaptar go raibh aois na bpáistí sa Daonáireamh Náisiúnta agus i ndaonáireamh na naíonraí (measúnú na Stiúrthóirí) cosúil lena chéile ach go raibh na tuismitheoirí, a bhí ag cur síos ar na páistí sular thosaíodar ar an naíonra, ag caint faoi na páistí nuair a bhíodar níos óige, ar an meán.

Taispeánann figiúirí an Daonáirimh Náisiúnta go bhfuil meath ar chéatadán na bpáistí idir trí agus ceithre bliana d'aois ar cainteoirí Gaeilge iad sa Ghaeltacht le fiche bliain anuas (ó 60% i 1971 go 40% i 1991). Taispeánann freagraí na dtuismitheoirí agus na Stiúrthóirí sa staidéar seo nach bhfuil cumas maith sa Ghaeilge ach ag 30-40% de pháistí naíonra na Gaeltachta. Chun cur in aghaidh an tsrutha seo, ní leor iarracht a dhéanamh tuismitheoirí a mhealladh chun Gaeilge a úsáid sa bhaile, gan díriú ar an imní atá orthu maidir le Béarla a bheith ag a bpáistí. Tuigtear cé chomh tábhachtach is atá an Béarla i saol an lae inniu agus ní mór a chinntiú dóibh go mbeidh Béarla líofa, idir labhairt agus scríobh, ag páistí atá á dtógáil le Gaeilge sa bhaile agus iad ag fágáil na scoile. I gcás ina bhfuil Gaeilgeoir agus Béarlóir pósta le chéile, b'fhiú torthaí an taighde ar na buntáistí a bhaineann leis an dátheangeachas ón gcliabháin a scaipeadh, chomh maith le heolas ar phróiséas shealbhú an dá theanga le chéile. Tarlaíonn, uaireanta, go mbíonn údarás 'béalteangeolaíoch' i measc an phobail ag teoiricí teangeolaíochta atá conspóideach nó nach nglactar leo a thuilleadh ag lucht acadúil. Mar shampla, b'fhéidir go gcreidtear fós gur baol go dtiocfaidh mearbheall ar pháiste a chloiseann dhá theanga ón tús, nó gur gá cloí go daingean leis an riail 'duine-amháin-teanga-amháin' chun an mearbhall sin a sheachaint. Tá eolas ar fáil a chabhródh le lanúin nach ionann a leibhéil chumais sa Ghaeilge, agus iad ag déanamh cinneadh faoin teanga a labhróidh siad lena bpáiste.

Tríd is tríd, taispeánann torthaí an taighde seo go bhfuil tíolacadh idirghlúine na Gaeilge ag leibhéal sách íseal i measc chainteoirí Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht. I gcás na naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht, cruthaíonn sin deacrachtaí faoi leith nuair atá ar an Stiúrthóir freastal ar riachtanais theangeolaíocha éagsúla na bpáistí atá sa ghrúpa aici. Pléifear an cheist seo i dtionscadal eile ar na naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht (Hickey, á ullmhú).

4.5 Éifeacht an Naíonra ar Úsáid na Gaeilge i Measc Tuismitheoirí

Thuairiscigh 81% de fhreagróirí gur bhraith siad méadú ar mhinicíocht úsáid na Gaeilge ag baile ó thosaigh a gcéad pháiste ag freastal ar naíonra. Léiríonn Tábla 4.5 gur thuairiscigh na tuismitheoirí méaduithe suntasacha ar úsáid na Gaeilge ag baill an teaghlaigh sa bhaile tar éis do pháiste tréimhse a chaitheamh i naíonra. Léirigh tástálacha staitistiúla go raibh méadú suntasach ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile i ngach ceann de na ceithre catagóirí ('mé féin agus mo chéile', 'mé féin agus mo pháiste', 'mo chéile agus an páiste', 'páistí lena chéile') tar éis do pháiste freastal ar naíonra. Cé nach bhfuil aon athrú ar an gcéatadán de thuismitheoirí a úsáideann an Ghaeilge 'i gcónaí' lena bpáirtí nó lena bpáistí, tuairiscíodh méadú de thrian agus níos mó ar úsáid 'rialta' na Gaeilge idir na tuismitheoirí agus na páistí agus i measc na bpáistí sa teaghlach céanna. Tháinig méadú ar líon na duismitheoirí agus na bpáistí a úsáideann an Ghaeilge 'uaireanta' sa bhaile chomh maith tar éis don pháiste freastal ar naíonra. Níor thuairiscigh ach 8% nach n-úsáideann siad Gaeilge 'riamh' lena bpáiste/bpáistí, i gcomparáid le 40% sular chuaigh an páiste ann.

Tábla 4.5 Úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile roimh fhreastal páiste ar naíonra agus ina dhiaidh

Minicíocht N=1779	*% Mé féin agus mo chéile*		*% Mé féin agus páiste/páistí*		*% Céile agus páiste/páistí*		*% Páistí lena chéile*	
	Roimhe	*Ina dhiaidh*	*Roimhe*	*Ina dhiaidh*	*Roimhe*	*Ina dhiaidh*	*Roimhe*	*Ina dhiaidh*
I gcónaí	6	6	7	7	6	6	5	5
Go rialta	3	7	8	28	5	15	4	12
Uaireanta	25	38	44	57	32	49	20	43
Riamh	56	41	40	8	47	20	57	26
Ní bhaineann/ Ar iarraidh	10	9	2	1	10	9	14	15
Iomlán	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Iarradh ar thuismitheoirí a rá cé na himeachtaí sa bhaile ar dócha roinnt Gaeilge a bheith bainteach leo, agus tugtar a rogha i dTábla 4.6.

Tábla 4.6 Imeachtaí a éilíonn úsáid na Gaeilge tar éis a bheith ag freastal ar naíonra

Imeachtaí *N Gall= 1,354* *N Gael= 425*	*% I gcónaí*		*% Go rialta*		*% Uaireanta*		*% Riamh*	
	Gall	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*
Ní/gléasadh	7	35	22	21	50	33	22	12
Béilí	6	31	25	24	55	34	15	12
Obair bhaile	10	35	23	22	29	21	38	22
Léamh scéalta	4	26	16	19	44	31	36	24
Urnaí sa bhaile/sa séipéal	4	36	11	18	26	19	59	28
Obair tí/sa ghairdín	3	27	16	17	46	29	35	28
Taisteal	3	26	16	16	48	34	32	25
Teilifís	2	24	11	14	41	28-	46	34
Raidió	2	24	4	9	21	22	73	45

Fág i leataobh an chatagóir 'i gcónaí', ar léiriú é, b'fhéidir, ar phatrúin úsáid bhaile sheasta do chéatadán teaghlach sách beag, agus ba iad na himeachtaí is minice a tuairiscíodh inar úsáideadh an Ghaeilge 'go rialta' nó 'uaireanta' i dteaghlaigh na Galltachta agus na Gaeltachta araon ná:

- béilí (67% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham san iomlán)
- an páiste á ní/á ghléasadh (61% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham san iomlán)
- ag taisteal (56% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham san iomlán)
- scéalta á léamh (52% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham san iomlán)i mbun obair tí nó garraíodóireachta (51% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham san iomlán)
- ag cabhrú le páistí eile i mbun obair bhaile (46% go rialta nó úsáid ó am go ham)

Bheifí ag súil go mbeadh taithí naíonra ag na páistí ar imeachtaí mar bhéile a chaitheamh, a lámha a ní, spraoi le huisce, éisteacht le scéalta a léifí dóibh agus a bheith ag glanadh suas i gcaitheamh an tseisiúin. Mar sin, bheadh gnéithe den teanga a úsáidtear sna réimsí sin ar eolas acu (ó thaobh tuisceana de agus roinnt ginchumais freisin). Ar na himeachtaí teaghlaigh ba lú a mheallfadh an Ghaeilge uathu, de réir cosúlachta, bhí éisteacht leis an raidió agus breathnú ar an teilifís (é seo ceangailte, ba dhóigh leat, leis an soláthar an-íseal clár Gaeilge a d'oirfeadh don aoisghrúpa seo roimh theacht Theilifís na Gaeilge), urnaí (sa bhaile/sa séipéal) sa Ghalltacht (toisc nach bhfuil seirbhísí as Gaeilge ar fáil dóibh go minic sa Ghalltacht).

Iarradh ar na tuismitheoirí a rá chomh maith an raibh siad páirteach in imeachtaí Gaeilge agus tugtar na sonraí i dTábla 4.7.

Tábla 4.7 Imeachtaí Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí de réir Galltachta/Gaeltachta

Imeachtaí	*% I gcónaí*		*% Go rialta*		*% Uaireanta*		*% Riamh*	
Gall N=1354 Gael N=425	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*	*Gall*	*Gael*
Breathnú ar chláir Ghaeilge ar RTÉ seachas *An Nuacht*[1]	6	20	8	17	47	38	38	25
Breathnú ar *An Nuacht*	7	24	6	15	45	30	43	30
Éisteacht le cláir Ghaeilge ar an raidió	4	16	5	13	34	33	57	37
Leabhair scéalta i nGaeilge a léamh do pháistí	5	18	7	14	33	30	54	39
Giotaí Gaeilge ar na nuachtáin a léamh	2	10	3	8	18	24	76	58
Leabhair Ghaeilge a léamh	2	11	2	7	17	30	79	52
Éisteacht le Raidió na Gaeltachta	4	22	3	17	13	22	81	39
Irisí/nuachtáin Ghaeilge a léamh	2	8	1	5	8	19	90	68

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1. Roimh theacht Theilifís na Gaeilge.

Léirigh crostábluithe le teanga an bhaile gurb iad na teaghlaigh ina labhraítear 'Gaeilge amháin' is mó a thuairiscigh a bpáirt sna himeachtaí sin 'i gcónaí' nó 'go rialta'. Má bhreathnaímid, mar sin, ar na figiúirí a bhaineann le húsáid ó thráth go a chéile (ar comharthaí iad a bhaineann níos mó le teaghlaigh 'Béarla amháin' agus 'Béarla agus Gaeilge') feicimid go ndeir a leath de na tuismitheoirí naíonra Galltachta, nach mór, go mbreathnaíonn siad ar An Nuacht agus ar chláir Ghaeilge eile ó am go a chéile (ag caint ar an tréimhse roimh theacht Theilifís na Gaeilge). Léann an tríú cuid díobh leabhair scéalta i nGaeilge dá bpáistí uaireanta, ach níl ach an séú cuid díobh a léifeadh leabhair Ghaeilge as a stuaim féin. Éisteann an tríú cuid díobh le cláir Ghaeilge ar an raidió náisiúnta ó am go a chéile, ach is lú ná an séú cuid díobh a thugann cluas do Raidió na Gaeltachta ó am go a chéile.

Níl ach thart ar an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí Gaeltachta i dteaghlaigh ina bhfuil an Béarla in uachtar a fhéachann fiú go hannamh ar chláir Ghaeilge ar RTÉ (dá neamhlíonmhaire iad), nó a éisteann le cláir Ghaeilge ar an raidió náisiúnta. Sna teaghlaigh Ghaeltachta seo ina labhraítear an Béarla níl ach an cúigiú cuid díobh, nó mar sin, a d'éistfeadh le Raidió na Gaeltachta uair ó am go chéile.[1]

Ag féachaint dúinn ar na céatadáin a thuairiscíonn nach nglacann siad páirt 'riamh' in imeacht ar leith, feicimid nach léann formhór na dtuismitheoirí naíonra sa Ghalltacht (76-90%) leabhair Ghaeilge riamh, ná nuachtáin Ghaeilge ná giotaí Gaeilge sna nuachtáin Bhéarla, agus ní éisteann siad riamh le Raidió na Gaeltachta. Deir os cionn a leath den ghrúpa seo nach léann siad leabhair scéalta i nGaeilge riamh dá bpáistí agus nach mbreathnaíonn siad riamh ar An Nuacht ar an teilifís, agus tá breis agus trian a dúirt nach mbreathnaíonn siad riamh ar chláir Ghaeilge ar RTÉ. Bheadh sé suimiúl a fháil amach an bhfuil méadú ar an mbreathnú ar chláir theilifíse Ghaeilge tar éis theacht Theilifís na Gaeilge.

Sa Ghaeltacht, dúirt breis agus dhá thrian de thuismitheoirí naíonra nach léann siad nuachtáin Ghaeilge ná tréimhseacháin riamh agus os cionn a leath nach léann leabhair Ghaeilge ná giotaí Gaeilge i nuachtáin Bhéarla riamh. Tá breis agus trian ann nach léann leabhair scéalta i nGaeilge dá bpáistí riamh agus nach n-éisteann riamh le Raidió na Gaeltachta.

4.6 LEIBHÉIL RANNPHÁIRTÍOCHTA SA NAÍONRA

De bhrí go léiríonn taighde go bhfuil ról lárnach ag tuismitheoirí san oideachas réamhscoile agus sa luath-thumadh, measadh gur den tábhacht é a fháil amach cé chomh gafa leis an naíonra is a bhraith na tuismitheoirí féin. Ní raibh ach 44% de na freagróirí agus 15% dá gcéile a d'fhreastail ar chruinniú tionscnaimh sular thosaigh a bpáiste sa naíonra. Is é an teagmháil is minice a bhíonn ag tuismitheoirí, na máithreacha ach go háirithe, ná an teagmháil riachtanach, an páiste óg a fhágáil sa naíonra agus a bhailiú. Chuir freagróirí in iúl nach raibh ann ach mionlach (13%) a labhair Gaeilge amháin agus iad i dteagmháil leis an naíonra; labhair a leath (50%) idir Ghaeilge agus Bhéarla; agus Béarla amháin a labhair breis agus a thrian (37%).

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[1] Léirigh na torthaí crostáblaithe gur éist 57% de na teaghlaigh ina labhraítear 'Gaeilge amháin' le Raidió na Gaeltachta 'go minic' agus 23% eile 'go rialta' (N=105), i gcomórtas le díreach 17% faoi seach i gcás na dteaghlach 'Béarla agus Gaeilge' (N=375).

Déanann móramh na dtuismitheoirí seiceáil ar dhul chun cinn an pháiste agus pléann siad an naíonra leis an bpáiste sa bhaile, uair in aghaidh na míosa ar a laghad. Níl ach 6% de na tuismitheoirí a chabhraíonn sa naíonra ar bhonn rialta, agus seans trí huaire níos mó (9%) go ndéanfadh tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta amhlaidh, uair in aghaidh na seachtaine ar a laghad, ná na freagróirí Galltachta (3%). Bhí seans níos mó go gcabhródh freagróirí Gaeltachta, uair sa mhí ar a laghad, le bainisteoireacht nó le gníomhaíochtaí tiomsaithe airgid (17%) ná na tuismitheoirí Galltachta (6%).

Sa deireadh, thuairiscigh 80% de na freagróirí, beagnach, agus 90% dá gcéile gur 'annamh' a úsáideann siad leabhair nó téipeanna naíonra ag baile, má úsáidtear 'riamh' iad. Ní léir an é nach bhfuil a fhios acu cad tá ar fáil, nó an é nach bhfuil siad sásta, nó in ann iad a úsáid. Déanfar tuilleadh plé air sin thíos sa mhír a bhaineann le riachtanais na dtuismitheoirí.

Thuairiscigh 60% de thuismitheoirí go raibh siad sásta lena leibhéal iomlán rannpháirtíochta sa naíonra, ach dúirt 39% go raibh an leibhéal ró-íseal. An dream deireanach sin, bhí 40% díobh a luaigh easpa Gaeilge mar chúis amháin lena leibhéal íseal rannpháirtíochta ach ba chúinsí praiticiúla is mó a bhí i dtreis, sa mhéad gur chuir 75% díobh in iúl gurb é an socrú baile, nó oibre, is mó a bhí ina bhac orthu. Ní raibh ach 2% a dúirt nach raibh siad níos gníomhaí toisc gur bhraith siad nach mbeadh fáilte rompu.

4.7 RIACHTANAIS NA dTUISMITHEOIRÍ

Iarradh ar na tuismitheoirí a rá cén t-eolas a chuireann an naíonra ar fáil dóibh agus cé na seirbhísí a bheadh ina gcabhair dóibh. Is beag difríocht a bhí idir na tuismitheoirí Galltachta agus na tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta maidir leis na seirbhísí nó maidir leis an gcabhair a bhí ann dóibh agus chun friotháil ar a gcuid riachtanas. Bhí thart ar a leath de na freagróirí ar theastaigh cóipeanna uathu de na rainn agus de na hamhráin a d'fhoghlaim na páistí sa naíonra, agus theastaigh ó bhreis agus an tríú cuid díobh samplaí de na nathanna a d'fhoghlaim na páistí, agus cúnamh chun leas a bhaint as an nGaeilge sa bhaile. Bíodh is go bhfuil cúnamh éigin ann cheana i bhfoirm leabhráin ina dtugtar focail agus nathanna Gaeilge do thuismitheoirí páistí naíonra (BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí/Basic Irish for Parents, Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann agus an Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, 1989), agus i bhfoirm póstaer, leabhar agus téipeanna (An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, Catalóg), dealraíonn sé go bhfuil go leor tuismitheoirí ann nach bhfuil cur amach acu ar na hacmhainní sin. Mar sin, is den tábhacht é na háiseanna atá ann cheana a chur ar a súile do na tuismitheoirí agus an tslí ab fhearr chun é sin a dhéanamh ná comhphlé faoina gceartúsáid ag cruinniú tráthnóna do thuismitheoirí. Faightear mar chuid de Chaibidil 8 moltaí a bhaineann le margú na n-ábhar a bhfuil fáil orthu faoi láthair trí mheán na Gaeilge do pháistí réamhscoile.

B'fhiú, leis, smaoineamh ar fhíseán a ullmhú do thuismitheoirí ar naíonra tipiciúil (agus cóipeanna de ar fáil i ngach naíonra a d'fhéadfadh na tuismitheoirí a fháil ar iasacht). Léireódh an físeán páistí agus nathanna coitianta á n-úsáid acu, mar shampla, *cuirfidh mé orm mo chóta, tá ocras orm, is liomsa é,* etc., agus d'fhéadfaí eolas a chur air faoin bhfiúntas a bhaineann le Gaeilge a chleachtadh leis an bpáiste, agus moltaí faoi na bealaí a d'fhéadfaí nathanna a chleachtadh go nádúrtha ag baile.

Bhí nach mór an tríú cuid de na freagróirí, i gceantair na Galltachta agus na Gaeltachta araon, ar mhaith leo freastal ar Ghrúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán trí mheán na Gaeilge, grúpa a sheasann do a leath de na freagróirí a raibh páiste/páistí acu níos óige ná páiste an naíonra. Bhí thart ar an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí a raibh cúnamh uathu chun leabhair Ghaeilge agus téipeanna a roghnú dá bpáistí, agus ceann de na cúiseanna nach mbaintear leas astu chomh minic sin ag baile ná na deacrachtaí a bhaineann lena roghnú.

4.8 ACHOIMRE

Is ar réimse fachtóirí a bhunaíonn tuismitheoirí a gcinneadh chun páiste a chur ar naíonra, cuid acu sin atá bunaithe ar fhoghlaim teanga agus cuid eile a bhaineann le fachtóirí ginearálta, nó fachtóirí oideachais. Deireann siad go bhfuil siad thar a bheith sásta leis an rogha atá déanta acu agus go bhfuil siad sásta dul chun cinn maith a bheith déanta ag an bpáiste, ní hamháin i gcúrsaí Gaeilge, ach i bhforbairt ghinearálta chomh maith. San iomlán, is de theaghlaigh Bhéarla iad formhór na bpáistí naíonra sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghalltacht araon. Bíonn tuismitheoirí sásta, tríd is tríd, lena leibhéal rannpháirtíochta féin sa naíonra agus is cuairteoirí 'táirsí' iad sa chuid is mó seachas rannpháirtithe gníomhacha sna naíonraí, ach tá scóip ann chun níos mó eolais a thabhairt dóibh faoi theanga agus faoi imeachtaí an naíonra, agus chun iad a spreagadh chun úsáid na Gaeilge a leathnú ag baile. Tá sé deacair an t-éileamh ar naíonraí a mheas go cruinn sa Ghalltacht, ach sa Ghaeltacht taispeánadh go bhfuil grúpa mór de pháistí réamhscoile nach bhfreastalaíonn go fóill ar naíonra. Tuigtear ó sin agus ón spéis a léirigh na tuismitheoirí naíonra i nGrúpaí Tuismitheoirí agus Tachran go bhfuil forbairt bhreise i ndán do ghluaiseacht na naíonraí.

Caibidil 5

Suirbhé ar Stiúrthóirí

5.1 Réamhra

Sa chaibidil seo scrúdaítear sonraí a bhaineann leis an naíonra, sonraí a chuir na Stiúrthóirí féin ar fáil. Cuireadh ceistneoir amach go dtí 167 Stiúrthóir a chlúdaigh an Daonáireamh naionrai agus fuarthas freagraí ó 162, nó 97%. Bunaithe ar an gceistneoir seo, tuairiscítear cáilíochtaí, taithí agus cumas Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí, chomh maith le hanailís ar oiliúint inseirbhíse, na saghsanna cúrsaí ab inmhianaithe, eagrú na hoibre sa naíonra agus an réimse imeachtaí atá á thairiscint.

5.2 Na Naíonraí

5.2.1 Ionad

Sa bhliain 1993 ba i dtithe príobháideacha a reáchtáladh 28% de sheisiúin naíonra, i scoileanna a bhí 25% díobh agus an chuid eile acu lonnaithe i hallaí agus i bhfoirgnimh phoiblí nach iad.

5.2.2 Táillí agus Fóirdheontais

Tugadh faoi anailís a dhéanamh ar tháillí agus ar fhóirdheontais agus baineadh leas as sonraí a chuir An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta ar fáil chuige sin, móide eolas a chuir na Stiúrthóirí féin ar fáil. Léiríonn sonraí an Chomhchoiste go bhfaigheann thart ar an tríú cuid de na naíonraí fóirdheontas ó Údarás na Gaeltachta. Ón méid eolais a fuarthas ó na Stiúrthóirí, dealraíonn sé go bhfaigheann céatadán ábhairín níos mó (43%) fóirdheontas, de shaghas amháin nó de shaghas eile, ón Údarás nó ó chomhlachtaí eile ar nós na mbord sláinte réigiúnach, nó ó Chonradh na Gaeilge (i bhfoirm iostais saor ó chíos nó fóirdheontas árachais).

Luann formhór na naíonraí (thart ar 80%) táillí ar bhonn seachtainiúil, agus 14% eile a luann táillí ar bhonn míosúil; roinntear an 6% eile cuibheasach cothrom ar bhonn rátaí in aghaidh an lae nó in aghaidh an téarma. Ach na figiúirí sin a athrú ar bhonn seachtainiúil feictear gur sa réimse £2 go £12.50 in aghaidh an pháiste, in aghaidh na seachtaine, atá na táillí a ghearradh ar thuismitheoirí i 1993. Ba é an meántáille i gcás naíonra a bhí ag feidhmiú le cabhair ón bhfóirdheontas ná thart ar £5 in aghaidh na seachtaine, i gcomórtas le meánfhigiúr £8 dóibh siúd nach raibh fóirdheontas á fháil acu.

5.3 AN STIÚRTHÓIR

5.3.1 Cáilíochtaí

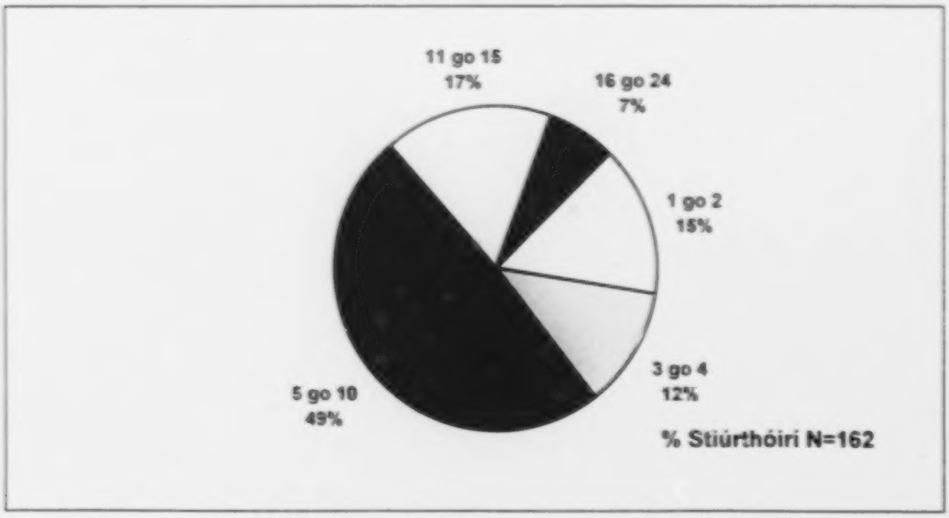
Bhí an cúrsa oiliúna a d'eagraigh An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta déanta ag na Stiúrthóirí go léir, nach mór, (94%). Bhí an Ardteistiméireacht déanta ag dhá thrian díobh, agus ba tuismitheoirí a thóg páistí le Gaeilge a leath díobh. Bhí cáilíochtaí bunmhúinteoireachta nó meánmhúinteoireachta ag mionlach díobh (9%), agus cúrsaí aitheanta sa luathoideachas, Montessori nó Froebel, déanta ag 10% eile. Thuairiscigh 5% go mba bhanaltraí iad agus chuir 10% in iúl go raibh cúrsa déanta acu faoi Chumann Ghrúpa Súgartha Réamhscolaíochta na hÉireann.

Is follasach go bhfuil an-tábhacht ar fad ag baint leis an gcúrsa oiliúna a reáchtálann An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta ó thaobh Stiúrthóirí a ullmhú de, ós í seo an t-aon oiliúint, nó an oiliúint is speisialaithe, a fhaigheann formhór mór na Stiúrthóirí. Tá géarghá ann, mar sin, an cúrsa seo a leathnú agus a dhéanamh níos cuimsithí, chun freastal níos fearr ar riachtanais an luath-thumtha, agus chun cáilíocht aitheanta a dhéanamh de. Déanfar plé níos mine ar seo i gCaibidil 8.

5.3.2 Taithí

Taispeánann Fíor 5.1 go bhfuil idir cúig agus deich mbliana taithí ar naíonra a rith ag an gcuid is mó de na Stiúrthóirí, rud a chruthaíonn stór scileanna nach beag.

Fíor 5.1 Blianta thaithí na Stiúrthóirí

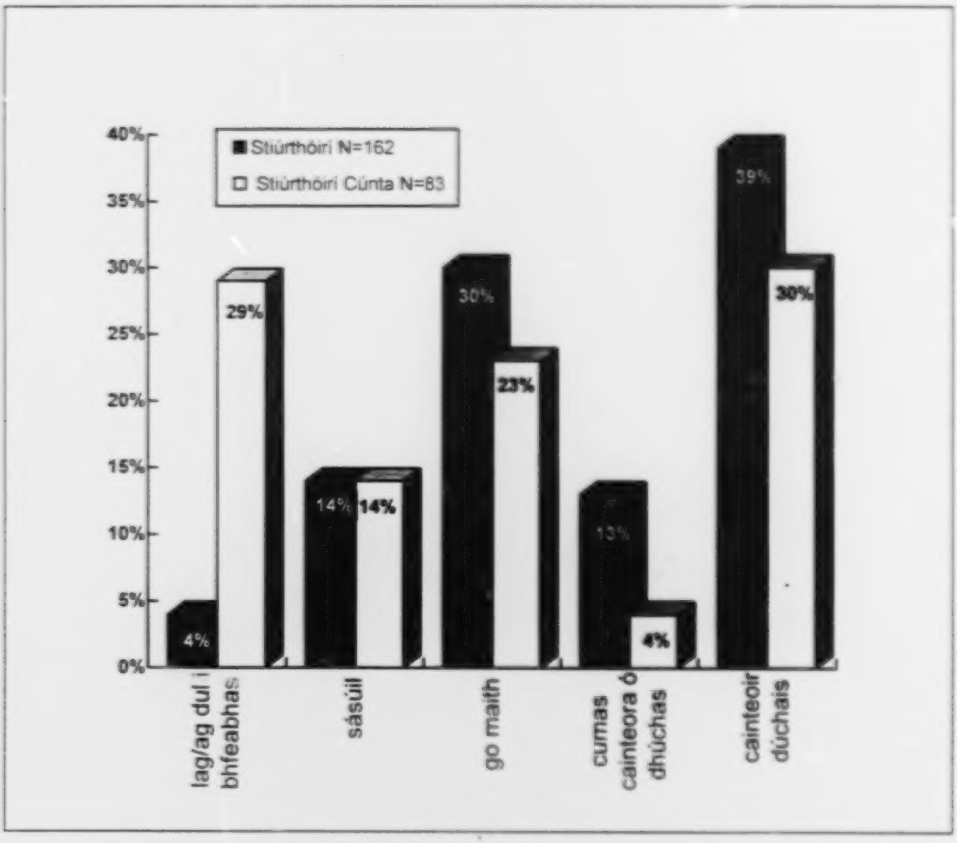


Tá ceithre bliana taithí, nó níos lú, ag 27% mar Stiúrthóirí, agus breis is deich mbliana taithí ag 24% eile. Thuigfí as sin gur cuibheasach íseal i measc Stiúrthóirí é an leibhéal tnáite, agus 73% a leanann orthu ar feadh cúig bliana ar a laghad. Dhealródh sé mar sin toradh a bheith ar an infheistíocht san oiliúint, tarlaíonn gur ráta athraithe foirne sách íseal é.

5.3.3 Cumas sa Ghaeilge

Ghrádaigh gach Comhairleoir cumas na Stiúrthóirí agus na Stiúrthóirí Cúnta sa Ghaeilge ina ceantar féin agus léirítear é sin i bhFíor 5.2.

Fíor 5.2 Cumas na Stiúrthóirí agus na Stiúrthóirí Cúnta sa Ghaeilge
(Gráduithe an Chomhairleora)



Tá cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas, nó gar go maith dó, ag níos mó ná a leath de na Stiúrthóirí. Grádaítear 30% eile agus cumas 'maith' acu. Is ísle ná sin, áfach, na leibhéil chumais a bhaineann le 18% de na Stiúrthóirí, agus le 44% de na Stiúrthóirí Cúnta.

Bíonn, ar ndóigh, tionchar ag leibhéal an chumais sa Ghaeilge atá ag an Stiúrthóir ar an gcineál Gaeilge a fhoghlaimeoidh an páiste sa naíonra. Cuid thábhachtach d'ionramháil T2, go háirithe d'fhoghlaimeoirí atá an-óg, is ea ionchur sothuigthe agus é bunaithe ar chomhthéacs. Chun an leas is fearr a bhaint as ionchur Gaeilge mar é sa naíonra, is dóchúil go gcaithfidh Stiúrthóirí a bheith líofa go maith sa teanga ar a laghad. An leibhéal seo líofachta amháin a chuirfidh ar chumas an Stiúrthóra na mionathruithe teanga is gá a thabhairt isteach: ardchéim rialtachta agus athrá, mar aon le héagsúlacht agus 'struchtúrú' nó 'scáfláil teanga'. Pléifear cumas Gaeilge an Stiúrthóra maidir leis an ionchur do pháistí thíos, agus níos déanaí sa chuid sin de Chaibidil 7 a bhaineann le torthaí na dtástálacha.

5.4 RÉIMSE GNÍOMHAÍOCHTAÍ

Iarradh ar na Stiúrthóirí a rá cén réimse imeachtaí a chuireann siad ar fáil go rialta sa naíonra sa téarma deireanach. Foireann oilte naíonraí a roghnaigh an liosta imeachtaí a cuireadh ar fáil. Tugtar na torthaí i dTábla 5.1.

Thuairiscigh níos mó ná 80% de na freagróirí gurb iad gnáthimeachtaí an ghnáthpháiste sa téarma deireanach ná spraoi sa chúinne baile, míreanna mearaí agus brící tógála. Fuair Douglas (1993) amach, chomh maith, go mbíonn fáil ar na himeachtaí sin agus go n-úsáidtear go han-mhinic iad sa chuid is mó dá shampla de 12 grúpa súgartha pobail agus 22 grúpa súgartha baile i bPoblacht na hÉireann.

Aisteach go leor, nuair a smaoinítear ar an mbéim a chuireann an Lámhleabhar ón gComhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, agus an cúrsa oiliúna, ar an luach a bhaineann le rímeanna agus le hamhráin a shníomh isteach i ngnáthimeachtaí laethúla eile, (féach, mar shampla, Ní Ailpín, 1985:20, Ó Murchú, 1985:43) níor úsáideadh an oiread sin sna naíonraí iad, gan ach 67% a thuairiscigh a n-úsáid laethúil, agus 32% a thuairiscigh a n-úsáid díreach uair nó dhó in aghaidh na seachtaine. Is aisteach é, chomh maith, nuair a smaoinítear gur rainn agus amhráin, seachas imeacht eile ar bith, a roghnaigh formhór na Stiúrthóirí mar ghníomhaíocht éifeachtach chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn sa naíonra. Roghnaigh 83% díobh í ar cheann de na cúig gníomhaíochtaí ab éifeachtaí ar fad.

Ba imeacht laethúil ag níos lú ná a leath de na Stiúrthóirí í an scéalaíocht, cé go raibh scéalaíocht ar siúl ag an leath eile uair nó dhó in aghaidh na seachtaine. Rud nach bhfuil baileach ag teacht leis an minicíocht sách íseal seo i measc mhóramh na Stiúrthóirí is ea an scéalaíocht a bheith grádaithe acu mar cheann de na himeachtaí múinte teanga ab éifeachtaí sa naíonra, agus beagnach an trí cheathrú díobh á roghnú mar cheann de na cúig imeachtaí ba thábhachtaí ann chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn sa naíonra.

Tábla 5.1 Réimse agus minicíocht gníomhaíochtaí sa naíonra

Cé chomh minic is a dhéanann an páiste ar an meán na gníomhaíochtaí seo i do naíonra sa téarma deireanach?

Gníomhaíocht	*Gach lá* %	*Uair nó dhó sa tseachtain* %	*< uair sa tseachtain* %	*ní dhéantar* %
Cúinne baile	82	13	0	5
Míreanna mearaí	80	19	1	1
Brící agus ábhar tógála	80	16	1	3
Amhráin agus rainn	67	32	0	1
Cailc agus criáin	60	38	1	2
Péintéireacht	53	42	1	3
Gaineamh	50	33	7	11
Scéalaíocht	42	54	3	1
Grúpchluichí	40	49	8	3
Meaitseáil cártaí	33	52	10	5
Taos	32	51	8	8
Uisce	24	53	12	11
Súgradh lasmuigh	20	42	22	17
Siosúr a úsáid	18	55	18	9
Lúthchleasa	15	44	18	23
Cré	9	36	22	33
Drámaíocht	5	43	23	29
Puipéid	1	30	40	28

B'fhéidir go dtaispeánann an difríocht seo idir rátáil na scéalaíochta agus a húsáid na deacrachtaí praiticiúla a bhaineann le ham scéalaíochta, más réasúnta mór é an naíonra, nó má táthar gan chúntóir. Léirigh an taighde ar na buntáistí a bhaineann le léamh os ard sa dara teanga le páistí óga, áfach, (mar shampla Romney, Romney agus Braun, 1989) go raibh de thoradh air feabhas ar an sealbhú focal agus cumas cumarsáide sa T2, i gcomparáid le grúpa inchomparáide nár chuala an scéal á léamh os ard. Mhol Romney *et al.* gur cheart go dtosódh an léamh os ard sa chiondargairdín luath-thumtha, agus an tslí ab fhearr chun tabhairt faoi ná le grúpaí beaga páistí.

Gníomhaíocht a mbaineann páistí taitneamh as is ea an cúinne baile, a chuireann 82% de na Stiúrthóirí ar fáil gach lá, agus 13% eile uair nó dhó in aghaidh na seachtaine. Ba é seo an tríú gníomhaíocht ba mhinice a roghnaíodh ó thaobh a éifeachtaí is atá sé i múineadh teanga, agus chuir 58% é sa chéad chúig gníomhaíochtaí teanga. Gabhann go leor buntáistí leis an súgradh samhlaíoch áirithe seo, mar shampla forás mothúchánach agus forás sóisialta a chur chun cinn, féinmheas a mhéadú agus eolas a chur ar an saol. Anuas air sin, tugann sé deis do na páistí an teanga atá foghlamtha acu a úsáid i gcomhthéacs imeachtaí laethúla, i dtimpeallacht thaitneamhach. Mar sin féin, ní mór a mheabhrú nach gá go dtabharfadh an cúinne baile an deis is fearr chun úsáid a bhaint as an nGaeilge nuair is páistí iad atá díreach tosaithe ar an dara teanga a ionramháil. Is dealraitheach go gcaithfidh cainteoir Gaeilge aosach a bheith páirteach ann chun úsáid na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn i measc na bpáistí, chomh maith leis na haidhmeanna leathana mothúchánacha agus sóisialta atá ag an ngníomhaíocht seo a chur i gcrích. Is sampla amháin é seo den ghá atá le cur chuige pleanála speisialta sa naíonra, agus athruithe bunúsacha a dhéanamh ar na gníomhachtaí a mbíonn fáil orthu de ghnáth i ngrúpa réamhscoile, nó i ngrúpa súgartha, le go mbeidís comhoiriúnach don luath-thumadh.

Léiríonn an réimse imeachtaí a chuirtear ar fáil gach lá sa naíonra an réimse scileanna a bhíonn á chur chun cinn ann, gan trácht in aon chor ar scileanna teanga iontu féin. Dá réir sin, cuireann an spraoi le brící, le míreanna mearaí, le gaineamh, le huisce, péint agus taos taithí thábhachtach ar fáil ar shubstaintí difriúla, agus tugann sé deis do na páistí taiscéalaíocht aonair a dhéanamh ar a sáimhín só, agus súgradh samhlaíoch, chomh maith le deis chun forbairt a dhéanamh ar bhunscileanna in uimhreacha ag leibhéil éagsúla cumais. Mar sin féin, i gcomhthéacs seo an naíonra, is den tábhacht é go mbeadh gné na teanga ag baint go sonrach le gach ceann de na himeachtaí tríd an bhfocalstór simplí sin a chur ar fáil do na páistí, focalstór a mbíonn gá acu leis chun cur síos ar a gcuid imeachtaí.

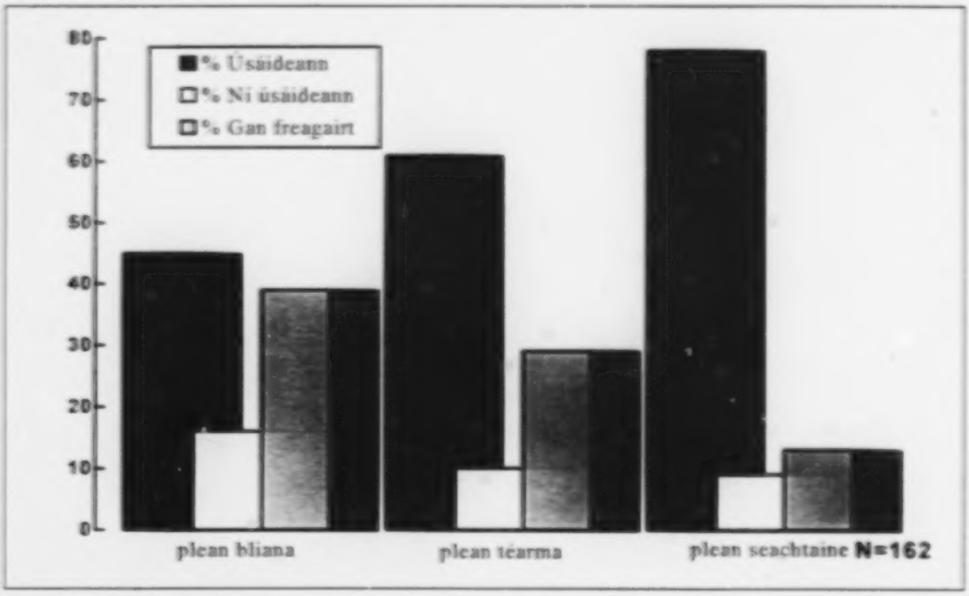
Is de dhlúth agus d'inneach eagrú gníomhaíochtaí sa naíonra é ceist ionchur na Gaeilge. Leagann an *Lámhleabhar do Stiúrthóirí* béim ar an ngá atá le huasmhéid an ionchuir shothuigthe a bheith mar chuid de gach imeacht. Ní hé atá i gceist leis sin síormhonalóg agus na páistí ina dtost, ach ardleibhéal idirghníomhaíochta idir an Stiúrthóir agus na páistí. Baineann go leor Stiúrthóirí an idirghníomhaíocht seo amach, ach thug na Comhairleoirí le fios go raibh suas leis an gcúigiú cuid de Stiúrthóirí 'lag' ó thaobh imeachtaí a úsáid chun sealbhú teanga a threisiú, agus bhí ceathrú eile nach raibh ach 'sásúil'. Is léir, mar sin, gur gá ionchur agus treisiú na Gaeilge a uasmhéadú agus gníomhaíochtaí á bpleanáil agus á gcur in oiriúint don naíonra, chun go gcomhlíonfaí an dá aidhm, forás ginearálta a chothú agus sealbhú na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn. Ní mór dul isteach sa cheist seo go mion san oiliúint amach anseo.

5.5 EAGRÚ NA hOIBRE

Cuireann cúrsa oiliúna an Chomhchoiste béim ar an mbuntáiste a bhaineann le pleanáil oibre. Cuireadh ceist an na Stiúrthóirí faoin ábhar seo agus léiríonn Fíor 5.3 conas mar a d'fhreagair siad an cheist.

Ba ghné neamhchoitianta den suirbhé seo an líon ard freagróirí nár fhreagair na ceisteanna seo, rud a chuireann in iúl, ní foláir, nach gcuireannn go leor de na daoine nár fhreagair an córas seo i bhfeidhm, ach is eol dóibh go molann An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta é. Léiríonn an figiúr sách íseal a bhaineann leis an bplean oibre bliana

Fíor 5.3 Pleananna Oibre



an gá atá le cúnamh breise chun pleanáil san fhadtéarma a fhoghlaim nuair a fhreastalaíonn siad ar chúrsai oiliúna agus inseirbhise. B'fhiú tosú leis an minicíocht a bhaineann leis an bpleanáil téarma a mhéadú ar a laghad. Léiríonn na torthaí seo ar phleanáil gur gá béim a chur san oiliúint ar na difríochtaí a bhaineann leis na cineálacha pleananna a mholtar, agus na buntáistí a bhaineann le plean leathan bliana, agus plean téarma, a chur i bhfeidhm, chomh maith le plean seachtaine.

Cuireadh ceisteanna ar na Stiúrthóirí maidir le *téama na seachtaine* agus *pointe suime na maidine* chomh maith. Thuairiscigh níos mó ná a leath de na Stiúrthóirí go n-úsáideann siad na cleachtais mhúinte teanga sin 'de ghnáth', ar a laghad, ach bhí thart ar an triú cuid nach ndéanann amhlaidh ach ó am go ham, agus thart ar an deichiú cuid nach mbacann leo in aon chor.

5.6 OILIÚINT INSEIRBHÍSE

Cuireann Comhairleoirí cúrsa gairid inseirbhíse lae nó leathlae ar fáil uair sa téarma, ar an meán, do Stiúrthóirí sa cheantar acusan. Freastalaíonn beagnach a leath de na Stiúrthóirí (46%) ar gach cúrsa a chuirtear ar fáil dóibh sa cheantar, agus freastalaíonn an chuid is mó den chuid eile orthu 'go rialta'. Níl ach mionlach de 15% de na Stiúrthóirí nach bhfreastalaíonn 'riamh' nó 'go hannamh', ar chúrsaí. Toradh sásúil é sin, tríd is tríd.

agus is léiriú é ar dhíograis na Stiúrthóirí, agus an spéis atá acu sna cúrsaí a chuirtear ar fáil dóibh.

Iarradh ar na Stiúrthóirí a rá cén réimse ábhar inseirbhíse a mbeadh spéis acu ann. Bhí níos mó ná a leath ar mhaith leo freastal ar chúrsaí ealaíon agus ceirdeanna, úsáid na drámaíochta agus na puipéadóireachta, agus pleanáil na hoibre sa naíonra. Bhí níos lú ná a leath a raibh spéis acu i síceolaíocht leanaí agus i gcúrsaí sláinte. Bhí thart ar an trí cuid de na Stiúrthóirí ar mhaith leo freastal ar chúrsaí a bhain le hionramháil an dara teanga agus conas leas a bhaint as ceol, rainn agus ealaín.

Sa taighde atá déanta ar oiliúint inseirbhíse (mar shampla ag Brine agus Shapson 1989; Fullan 1982) dírítear ar na laigí a bhaineann leis an oiliúint seo i gcoitinne. Ní mór, dar leo, sraitheanna cúrsaí a eagrú ar an ábhar céanna, chun seans a thabhairt do mhúinteoirí scileanna nua a chleachtadh agus an taithí sin a phlé lena bpiaraí. B'fhiú, leis, cúrsaí a dhíriú ar dhaoine nach bhfuil scileanna faoi leith acu, nó atá lag i réimse faoi leith. Ba bhuntáiste é na moltaí óna leithéid de Brine agus Shapson a phlé i gcomhthéacs chúrsaí inseirbhíse na naíonraí, chun an úsáid is fearr a bhaint as an áis seo sa todhchaí.

5.7 AN CÚNAMH A THEASTAÍONN

Iarradh ar Stiúrthóirí a rá cén cúnamh sa réimse roghanna a cuireadh ar fáil dóibh is mó a dhéanfadh a leas. Tugtar achoimre i dTábla 5.2 ar na freagraí, in ord minicíochta (ní fhaightear 100% nuair a chuirtear na céatadáin le chéile, de bhrí go bhféadfadh an freagróir níos mó ná cúnamh amháin a lua).

Bhí spéis ag níos mó ná a leath de na freagróirí cuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile. Baineann sé seo leis an teagmháil le Stiúrthóirí eile a theastaigh ón trí cuid de na freagróirí, geall leis. Bíodh is go gcuireann na Comhairleoirí comhairle agus treoir ar fáil, d'fhéadfadh go mbraithfeadh Stiúrthóirí go bhfuilid scoite amach óna gcomhghleacaithe, gan caidreamh sách minic acu le piara. B'fhéidir an aonaránacht seo a shárú ach socrú a dhéanamh idir phéirí Stiúrthóirí, le go bhféadfaidís bualadh le chéile go neamhfhoirmiúil, nó labhairt lena chéile ar an bhfón anois is arís.

Thuairiscigh an trí cuid acu siúd a bhfuil teacht acu ar Ghaelscoil nó scoil sa Ghaeltacht gur beag teagmháil a bhíonn acu léi, má bhíonn teagmháil in aon chor, agus dúirt dhá thrian díobh an rud céanna i dtaca le scoileanna Béarla de. Thuairiscigh an ceathrú cuid de na freagróirí uile go mba chuidiú é aitheantas a fháil ón mbunscoil áitiúil, agus is léiriú breise é seo go mbraitheann roinnt Stiúrthóirí nach dtugann a gcomhoideachasóirí a gceart dóibh, dar leo. B'fhéidir dul i ngleic leis an bhfadhb sin, seans, ach teagmháil leis na scoileanna áitiúla a éascú, ar dtús trí chruinnithe foirmiúla idir an Stiúrthóir, a Comhairleoir, Príomhoide na scoile agus an múinteoir naíonán. I ndeireadh na dála, áfach, is ceist chigilteach í an cheist seo faoi aitheantas oifigiúil agus aitheantas ó scoileanna áitiúla, ceist a bhfuil a fréamh san easpa aitheantais oifigiúil do thábhacht an

Tábla 5.2 An cúnamh ab éifeachtaí

Cén saghas cúnaimh is mó atá de dhíth ort, dar leat?	%
Deis ar chuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile	53
Fearas nua	42
Níos mó teagmhála le Stiúrthóirí eile	32
Dóthain ama le freastal ar chúrsaí atá ar fáil cheana	30
Cúrsaí nua	28
Cúrsaí Gaeilge do thuismitheoirí	27
Aitheantas ón mbunscoil áitiúil	23
Cúrsa Gaeilge don Stiúrthóir féin nó dá cúntóir	18
Níos mó teagmhála leis an ngaelscoil is cóngaraí	13
Níos mó tacaíochta ó na tuismitheoirí	12
Aitheantas ón ngaelscoil áitiúil	9
Níos mó teagmhála le tuismitheoirí	4
Níos mó teagmhála leis an gcomhairleoir	3

oideachais réamhscoile do pháistí uile na tíre. Is ar an leibhéal sin chomh maith a chaithfear aghaidh a thabhairt ar an gceist.

Thug tuairim is a leath de na Stiúrthóirí le fios gur mhaith leo fearas nua a fháil. Faigheann gach naíonra nua trealamh ar fiú timpeall £300 é, ach i ndiaidh an tsoláthair thionscnaimh seo, ní mór do Stiúrthóirí a gcuid gníomhaíochtaí bailithe airgid féin a eagrú chun bréagáin agus trealamh nua a cheannach, nó a athsholáthar. Dá dheasca sin, caitheann go leor Stiúrthóirí agus tuismitheoirí a lán ama agus fuinnimh i mbun airgead a bhailiú. Ní mór a thabhairt faoi deara chomh maith nach ceist acmhainní amháin í seo, ós rud é gur lú na háiseanna teagaisc atá ar fáil do thumghrúpaí súgartha Gaeilge ná do ghrúpaí Béarla, cé go bhfuil An Comhchoiste Réamhscoclaíochta agus eagrais eile ag cabhrú chun feabhas a chur ar an scéal seo le déanaí.

Anuas ar an athbhreithniú seo ar na hathruithe a theastaíonn ó na Stiúrthóirí, is díol spéise é féachaint ar na nithe nár mhaith leo a athrú. De bhrí nár thuairiscigh ach 3% díobh gur mhaith leo níos mó teagmhála a bheith acu leis an gComhairleoir, is féidir a bhaint as sin gur leor nó gur sásúil é an leibhéal teagmhála mar atá sé faoi láthair, thart ar uair in aghaidh na míosa. Ní raibh ach 4% díobh ar theastaigh níos mó teagmhála a bheith acu le tuismitheoirí, agus thuairiscigh siad chomh maith go labhraíonn a leath acu leis na tuismitheoirí níos mó ná uair in aghaidh na seachtaine, agus an triú cuid acu uair in aghaidh na seachtaine. Ag freagairt ceiste eile, dúirt móramh na Stiúrthóirí go bhfáiltíonn siad roimh thuismitheoirí mar chúntóirí uaireanta, ach d'fhéadfadh go mbraitheann sé seo ar an tuismitheoir a thapódh an deis agus cabhair a thairiscint. Dúirt thart ar an gcúigiú cuid díobh gur mhaith leo tuismitheoirí a bheith sa naíonra níos minice ach bhí an cúigiú cuid eile ar a mhalairt de thuairim. B'fhéidir gurb é atá laistiar den easaontú barúla seo ná an easpa cumais sa Ghaeilge a bhaineann le grúpa áirithe tuismitheoirí.

Dealraíonn sé go ndíríonn Stiúrthóirí go príomha ar Ghaeilge na dtuismitheoirí. Bhí thart ar a leath acu a spreagfadh tuismitheoirí chun freastal ar chúrsaí agus ceathrú eile acu ar mhaith leo níos mó de na cúrsaí sin a bheith ar fáil. Spéisiúil go leor, teastaíonn cúrsaí Gaeilge ón gcúigiú cuid nó mar sin de na tuismitheoirí chomh maith, nó grúpa comhrá sa Ghaeilge. Is dócha gur ceart a rá go dtugann tacaíocht na dtuismitheoirí sa bhaile, maidir leis na focail Ghaeilge agus na nathanna Gaeilge nuafhoghlamtha ag an bpáiste, an-spreagadh d'obair an Stiúrthóra, agus ní hionadh mar sin an bhéim seo ar leibhéil a gcuid Gaeilge.

5.8 MEASÚNÚ Á DHÉANAMH AG COMHAIRLEOIRÍ

D'fhonn teacht ar chomparáidí meastóireachta áirithe idir naíonraí, iarradh ar na Comhairleoirí meastóireacht ghinearálta a dhéanamh ar gach naíonra ina gceantair féin, chun teacht ar léargas níos leithne ar a bhfeidhmiú. Iarradh ar na Comhairleoirí an Stiúrthóir agus a Stiúrthóir Cúnta/Comhstiúrthóir a ghrádú maidir le húsáid na Gaeilge de agus iad ag déileáil leis na páistí. Ní hé a gcumas Gaeilge atá á mheas anseo, mar sin, ach iad a bheith ábalta ar an teanga a chur i láthair na bpáistí ar bhealach a d'éascódh a sealbhú. Measadh an ceathrú cuid de na Stiúrthóirí a bheith ar fheabhas, dhá thrian eile de na Stiúrthóirí agus dá gcomhoibrithe a bheith sásúil ar a laghad ó thaobh úsáid na Gaeilge leis na páistí de, ach bhí 7% de na Stiúrthóirí agus suas le 20% dá gcúntóirí a bhí 'lag' nó 'mishásúil' ó thaobh úsáid na Gaeilge leis na páistí de, i dtuairim na gComhairleoirí. Ar ndóigh, tá baint aige seo le cumas sa Ghaeilge i gcoitinne.

Iarradh ar na Comhairleoirí meastóireacht a dhéanamh ar an réimse imeachtaí a cuireadh ar fáil i ngach naíonra agus ar eagrú na n-imeachtaí sin. Tá a gcuid gráduithe le fáil i dTábla 5.3. Mheas na Comhairleoirí réimse agus eagrú gníomhaíochtaí a bheith ar fheabhas ag an séú cuid de na naíonraí. Measadh, áfach, thart ar 10% a bheith lag, ar a mhéid, sa mhír sin, agus beagnach trian eile nach raibh ach sásúil. Tharlódh sé gur fadhb acmhainní is cúis leis sin, méid áirithe, sa tslí gur deacair réimse leathan imeachtaí a chur ar fáil mura mbíonn cistiú sásúil ann chuige sin.

Measadh feidhmiú an réimse imeachtaí chun foghlaim agus úsáid na teanga a chur chun cinn a bheith go maith, ar a laghad, i níos mó ná a leath de na naíonraí ach gan é a bheith ach sásúil ag ceathrú eile agus lag, sa chuid is fearr de, ag an gcuid eile. Is é is dóigh leis na Comhairleoirí, dá réir sin, go bhféadfaí feabhas a chur ar thart ar a leath de na naíonraí chun cur le foghlaim agus úsáid teanga an pháiste trí na himeachtaí go léir a mbíonn sé gafa leo i gcaitheamh a thréimhse sa naíonra.

Tábla 5.3 Réimse agus eagrú imeachtaí (Grádú an Chomhairleora)

	Réimse imeachtaí %	*Eagrú imeachtaí* %	*Treisiú teanga trí imeachtaí* %
Ar fheabhas	16	16	14
Go maith	45	44	41
Sásúil	29	27	26
Lag	7	10	16
Míshásúil	3	2	3
	100	100	100

Is é an léargas a fhaighimid ón meastóireacht seo ná dáileadh naíonraí i dtreo bharr feabhais, thart ar an séú cuid díobh agus iad ag feidhmiú ar fheabhas, agus thart ar 70% a fheidhmíonn go maith nó go sásúil, ach thart ar 10% a fheidhmíonn go lag. Is é an dúshlán atá ann, mar sin, leibhéal gníomhúcháin an ghrúpa is laige a ardú. Chuige sin, b'fhéidir smaoineamh ar athoiliúint ar leith don ghrúpa seo a chur ar fáil dóibh siúd is laige agus, anuas air sin, (nó mar mhalairt dóibh siúd ar leasc leo freastal ar chúrsaí inseirbhíse) díriú ar nuashonrú eolais agus roinnt acmhainní a chur ar fáil dóibh. Slí eile nach mbeadh bagrach ar dhóigh ar bith chun cuidiú leis na Stiúrthóirí sin forbairt phroifisiúnta a dhéanamh ná socruithe péireála idir na Stiúrthóirí sin ar léir iad a bheith ag feidhmiú go héifeachtach agus iad siúd ar easpa taithí. Sa deireadh, an cineál tacaíochta ba thábhachtaí a d'fhéadfaí a chur ar fáil do na Stiúrthóirí atá ag feidhmiú go lag ná cúrsa teanga ar feadh tréimhse sa Ghaeltacht, agus codanna de ag díriú ar idirghníomhaíocht le páistí óga trí Ghaeilge, ach chaithfeadh na Stiúrthóirí agus Stiúrthóirí Cúnta aonair sin dúthracht a léiriú chuige sin agus misneach agus spreagadh a fháil ón gComhchoiste.

5.9 CONCLÚIDÍ

Tugann na torthaí seo le fios gur measadh formhór na Stiúrthóirí, agus an tasc deacair atá acu, a bheith ag feidhmiú go maith nó thar barr, agus gan ach mionlach díobh a raibh oiliúint bhreise, nó athoiliúint, de dhíth orthu. Cruthaíonn freagraí na Stiúrthóirí gur dream oibrithe iad atá dúthrachtach, a bhfuil a gcuid riachtanas féin acu maidir le hoiliúint agus le fearas a gcaithfear aghaidh a thabhairt orthu. Le fada an lá aithníodh an gá le leathnú a dhéanamh ar an gcúrsa oiliúna a eagraíonn An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, ós í seo an oiliúint is speisialta a fhaigheann formhór na Stiúrthóirí. Faoi láthair, tá An Comhchoiste ag lorg aitheantais le haghaidh cúrsa oiliúna níos cuimsithí, a fhreastalódh níos fearr ar riachtanais na réamhscolaíochta agus an luath-thumtha ach go háirithe. Ní mór tacaíocht a chur ar fáil chomh maith chun scileanna

Gaeilge a fhorbairt i measc na Stiúrthóirí is ísle leibhéal cumais, mar ardtosaíocht. Pléifear an dá cheist bhunúsacha seo arís i gCaibidil 8.

Aithnítear an gá a bhíonn ag naíonraí le hacmhainní breise, ach go dtí seo, is lú aird a tarraingíodh ar an ngá atá ag Stiúrthóirí idirghníomhú lena bpiaraí agus breathnú ar naíonraí eile. Tá ról an Stiúrthóra sách aonarach, agus d'fhéadfaí cabhrú leo, chomh maith, ach teagmhálacha le grúpaí súgartha, agus le scoileanna áitiúla, a thionscnamh. Ceisteanna tromchúiseacha ar gá aghaidh a thabhairt orthu iad pá íseal, easpa aitheantais phroifisiúnta agus dul chun cinn, d'fhonn díocas a bhuanú agus éifeachtacht a neartú.

I dtaca le himeachtaí de, is ríléir go gcuireann formhór na Stiúrthóirí réimse leathan imeachtaí ar fáil do pháistí ina naíonraí agus é mar aidhm leo fónamh ar an bhforás fisiceach, cognaíoch, mothúchánach agus sóisialta, mar aon le freastal ar shealbhú na Gaeilge. Mar sin féin, is iad na naíonraí is fearr a n-éiríonn leo ná na naíonraí sin a bhaineann leas as na himeachtaí sin go léir chun Gaeilge an pháiste a fheabhsú le linn dóibh scileanna eile a fhorbairt. Ní haon dóithín é tasc an Stiúrthóra, ach is den tábhacht é go mbeidís oilte agus ullmhaithe chun an freastal is fearr a dhéanamh ar an dá aidhm atá acu, forás ginearálta agus sealbhú na Gaeilge a bhaint amach.

Caibidil 6

Measúnú Torthaí na dTrialacha

6.1 NA TRIALACHA

Forbraiodh trialacha ar thuiscint. ar ghinchumas agus ar aithris sa Ghaeilge. Chomh maith le sin. forbraiodh triail ar chumas cognaioch ginearálta. a cuireadh ar an páisti sa teanga is láidre a bhi acu. Chuir na Comhairleoiri áitiúla gach ceann de na trialacha seo ar shampla de 225 páiste ó 25 naionra. agus rinneadh tástáil ar gach páiste ina aonar. Gheofar sonrai i dtaobh na dtrialacha. an modh agus an sampla in Hickey (1997).

6.2 A BHFUIL AR EOLAS AG NA PÁISTÍ: SCÓIR MHÁISTREACHTA

Ceapadh trialacha Ghaeilge chun a thaispeáint cé na leibhéil i gcumas na Gaeilge a bhí bainte amach ag daltai nó ag grúpai daltai áirithe. Foireann oilte naionrai agus taithi acu ar dhul chun cinn an pháiste sa naionra a thuairimigh an leibhéal ratha a ba chóir a bheith ag súil leis. Trid is trid. ni bhitear ag súil go n-éireodh leo i ngach mir. agus nuair a bhi na trialacha á gcumadh beartaiodh go seasfadh ráta ratha- de 75%. nó mar sin. do mháistreacht ar na haidhmeanna teanga i gcás mhóramh na bpáisti naionra. Measadh iosdul chun cinn (féach Harris. 1984) a bheith déanta ag páisti a bhain ráta ratha 40% amach. ar a laghad. Is féidir achoimre mar a leanas a dhéanamh ar leibhéil ghnóthachtála na bpáisti sna tástálacha:

Sa staidéar seo féachadh ar thoradh an phróisis sealbhaithe. seachas ar an bpróiseas féin. mar a scrúdaigh Owens (1992) abair. i gcás páiste amháin ag sealbhú na Gaeilge mar T2. agus Wyn Siencyn (1983) i gcás 41 páiste ag sealbhú na Breatnaise. Mar chomparáid. faoin am ar thug Wyn Siencyn a triú cuairt ar an ngrúpa súgartha Breatnaise. ag deireadh an triú téarma. bhi 'tuiscint éigin don Bhreatnais' ag breis agus a leath de na páisti agus 'roinnt mhaith tuisceana don Bhreatnais' ag thart ar an gceathrú cuid diobh. Ba chosúil go maith é an dáileadh ar chumas labhartha (ginchumas) na Breatnaise tráth na cuairte sin. Faoin am ar thug si an ceathrú cuairt um Shamhain. áfach. agus an chuid is mó de na daltai tosaithe ar an mbunscoil. bhi bearna nios mó idir an tuiscint agus an ginchumas. agus ginchumas na Breatnaise chun deiridh ar an tuiscint.

Mar a thaispeántar i dTábla 6.1 i gcás na bpáisti naionrai. bhi bearna nios mó fós idir tuiscint agus labhairt na Gaeilge. agus scór nios airde á bhaint amach ag nios mó páisti san fhotheist tuisceana ná sa ghinchumas. Rinne na páistí go léir, nach mór, íosdul chun cinn ar a laghad sa tuiscint, rud a léiríonn forás fiúntach, go háirithe i measc na bpáistí nach raibh focal Gaeilge acu agus iad ag tosú sa naíonra. Tríd is tríd, mar sin, is féidir a rá faoi bhreis agus 40% de na páistí, go raibh scileanna suntasacha tuisceana acu ar fhágáil an naíonra dóibh (scóráil 75% nó níos mó), agus go raibh íosdul chun cinn, ar a laghad, déanta ag 95% sa tuiscint (scóráil 40% nó níos mó).

Tábla 6.1 Gnóthú sna Trialacha Gaeilge

Triail	*% a shroich rath tástála 40%*			*% a shroich rath tástála 75%*		
	Galltacht N=167	*Gaeltacht N=58*	*Iomlán N=225*	*Galltacht N=167*	*Gaeltacht N=58*	*Iomlán N=225*
Tuiscint	90	97	95	39	56	43
Ginchumas	53	75	59	7	35	14
Aithris	82	66	78	39	35	38

Maidir le ginchumas sa Ghaeilge, rinne leath de pháistí na Galltachta agus trí cheathrú de pháistí na Gaeltachta íosdul chun cinn ar a laghad (scóráil 40% nó níos mó). Ní haon ionadh é, áfach, ag an gcéim an-luath seo de shealbhú an dara teanga, nach mbaineann ach thart ar an séú cuid scór máistreachta ar leibhéal níos airde amach, 75%, sa triail ar ghinchumas. Bíonn foireann atá oilte ar naíonraí ag súil gur sa tuiscint ar dtús a dhéanfaidh an páiste an príomhdhul chun cinn agus an dul chun cinn sa ginchumas gan a bheith chomh follasach céanna. Tá a fhios againn le fada (féach, mar shampla, Hakuta, 1976, Hatch, 1974) go ngabhann go leor foghlaimeoirí óga T2 trí 'thréimhse thostach' ar dtús, ar feadh roinnt míonna b'fhéidir, nuair a bhíonn an-drogall orthu oiread agus focal den T2 a labhairt, ainneoin go dtuigeann siad go maith í, de réir cosúlachta. Thug Owens (1992) faoi deara go raibh scileanna tuisceana cuibheasach maith forbartha ag a hiníon, Eithne, tar éis bliana amháin sa naíonra, chomh maith le focalstór labhartha níos teoranta, agus stór rann, amhrán agus roinnt nathanna aici. Ní go dtí go raibh sí sa dara bliain ag an naíonra a léirigh Eithne dul chun cinn níos sciobtha i labhairt na teanga.

Baineann tosca pearsantachta chomh maith le luathshaothrú T2, mar shampla meon an pháiste a ligfadh dó dul san fhiontar leis na focail agus leis na nathanna atá sealbhaithe aige cheana. Léirigh Wong Fillmore (1976) difríochtaí áirithe i measc Spáinniseoirí óga agus an Béarla á fhoghlaim acu, ó thaobh úsáid foirmlí agus nathanna de: bhí cailín amháin nár leasc léi dul sa seans agus a thapaigh an deis chun an stór beag focal agus foirmlí Béarla a bhí aici a úsáid, nuair ba léir gur straitéis níos anailísí ab fhearr le dalta eile agus tógáil a dhéanamh ar fhocail aonair. Ní hé gach foirmle a éascaíonn foghlaim teanga: cruthaíodh go n-éiríonn nathanna áirithe, a fhoghlaimítear ina mbloic, sioctha agus neamh-indeighilte. Faightear saghsanna eile foirmlí, áfach, agus más ann don spreagadh agus don scafláil cuí, déantar deighilt agus anailís orthu sula siocann siad, rud a chuireann ar chumas an pháiste dul ar aghaidh ó 'fhoghlaim i míreanna' mar a deir Cruttenden (1981), go dtí 'foghlaim chórasach'. Thuairimigh Mhic Mhathúna (1995) gurb í an chéim ba thábhachtaí d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge i measc ceathrar páistí naíonra a bhí faoi scrúdú aici gur thosaigh siad ag úsáid a gcuid foirmlí i gcomhthéacsanna nua, chomh maith lena gcomhthéacsanna bunaidh, rud a tharla agus iad ag tosú ar urlabhra ar bhonn níos cruthaithí.

Sa triail aithrise, bhí breis agus 90% de na páistí a bhí in ann glanaithris a dhéanamh ar abairt ag a raibh dhá shiolla, e.g. ná déan. In abairt ag a raibh cúig shiolla, áfach, ní raibh móramh na bpáistí in ann aithris a dhéanamh ach ar an dá shiolla dheireanacha. Bhí patrún an chruinnis aithrise ag teacht go maith le Prionsabal Oibríochta[1] Slobin (1973) i gcás leanaí a shealbhaíonn a gcéad teanga - 'aird a thabhairt ar thús agus ar dheireadh na bhfocal' agus ba iad sna siollaí a chuir críoch le hurlabhra a fuarthas an cruinneas aithrise ba mhó, agus sa dara háit bhí na siollaí tosaigh.

Tríd is tríd, scóráil na páistí níos fearr sa tuiscint agus san aithris ná sa ghinchumas. Is é seo an patrún forbartha a mbítear ag súil leis, ina leagtar síos an tuiscint ar dtús a chabhraíonn le scileanna aithrise, sula mbíonn na páistí láninniúil na gnéithe a thuigeadar a chur i bhfocail. B'fhéidir réimse suntais a mhapáil de na míreanna teanga a thuig na páistí agus a bhíodar in ann a ghinchumadh. Ní haon ionadh go raibh níos mó páistí in ann na míreanna agus na habairtí a bhain le saol an naíonra a thuiscint agus a úsáid[2]. Tá grúpa de mhíreanna ann ar thug breis agus 70% de na páistí freagraí cearta orthu, agus grúpa eile de mhíreanna nár fhreagair ach 40% go cruinn iad. D'éirigh go maith leis na páistí ag freagairt d'orduithe agus d'abairtí ar cuid de ghnáthamh nó de chluichí an naíonra iad, mar shampla 'suigh síos', 'seas suas', 'is liomsa é': d'fhéadfadh gur foirmlí iad sin do na páistí, nó frásaí neamhanailísithe nach féidir leo a úsáid taobh amuigh den chomhthéacs teoranta (Hickey 1993). Bhí míreanna áirithe inar scóráil siad go maith a bhain le rainn agus amhráin, mar shampla 'tá duine ag an doras'. Tagraíonn a thuilleadh de na frásaí seo do na baill bheatha agus bhí an móramh in ann iad sin a úsáid. Is fiú a thabhairt faoi deara go raibh an scóráil i gcás na bpríomhcheannaithe, súil, srón, béal, i bhfad níos airde ná na gnéithe níos imeallaí, gruaig agus cluas, nach bhfuil chomh suntasach céanna agus ar lú an cur amach atá orthu. Mar an gcéanna le dathanna: ba thúisce a sealbhaíodh na téarmaí bríomhara péintéireachta agus dathadóireachta, 'dearg' agus 'buí' ná 'dubh'. Tríd is tríd, is sna míreanna sin a thug cur síos ar ghiuirléidí, ar imeachtaí nó ar thaithí an naíonra agus ar dócha spéis phearsanta a bheith ag na páistí iontu, is airde a bhí an scóráil: mar shampla, ba mhinice a tugadh an freagra ceart i gcás 'bróga' agus 'madra' ná i gcás 'gealach' nó 'bosca'.

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[1] 'Operating principles'.

[2] Ní mór teorainn a bheith le samplaí de mhíreanna ar leith anseo, toisc a thábhachtaí is atá sé iomláine na trialach a choinneáil le húsáid amach anseo.

6.3 ACHOIMRE

Thug an chaibidil seo achoimre ar na scóir a baineadh amach sna trialacha a forbraíodh agus a úsáideadh sa tionscadal seo. Dearbhaíodh na trialacha a bheith bailí agus iontaofa. Léirigh torthaí iomlána na dtrialacha Gaeilge gur fhreagair beagnach a leath de na páistí an triail tuisceana go cruinn agus go raibh íosdul chun cinn, ar a laghad, sa tuiscint déanta ag an leath eile (a d'fhreagair ar a laghad 40% de na míreanna sin go cruinn). Faoi mar a bhíothas ag súil leis, bhí ginchumas na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge chun deiridh ar an tuiscint, agus ní raibh ach 14% (7% sa Ghalltacht agus 35% sa Ghaeltacht) a bhí in ann an chuid is mó de na míreanna tástála a bhain leis an nginchumas a fhreagairt go cruinn. Mar sin féin, bhí íosdul chun cinn i labhairt na Gaeilge déanta ag leath de pháistí na Galltachta, agus trí cheathrú de pháistí na Gaeltachta. Léiríonn na torthaí seo go mbaineann na páistí leibhéal suntasach gnóthachtála amach sa Ghaeilge: Déanann móramh mór tuiscint bhunúsach a fhorbairt, agus tá níos mó ná a leath a bhfuil tuiscint sách forbartha acu agus cumas teoranta iontu iad féin a chur in iúl sa Ghaeilge chomh maith. Is fiú a mheabhrú anseo, mar sin, go dtosaíonn na páistí seo ar an mbunscoil agus dul chun cinn suntasach déanta acu i sealbhú na Gaeilge, murab ionann agus a bpiaraí nach raibh taithí acu ar luath-thumadh sa Ghaeilge.

Caibidil 7

Tionchair ar Ghnóthachtáil sa Ghaeilge

7.1 RÉAMHRÁ

Sa chaibidil seo déantar iniúchadh ar na fachtóirí a théann i bhfeidhm ar ghnóthachtáil na bpáistí sna trialacha tuisceana agus ginchumais, chun na tionchair éagsúla a mheas le roinnt mhaith modhanna staitistiúla. Ba dhóigh leat go mbraithfeadh gnóthachtáil thomhaiste na bpáistí cuid mhaith ar a scileanna cognaíocha ginearálta féin, ar an timpeallacht teanga sa bhaile agus sa chomharsanacht agus ar an timpeallacht teanga ar leith a chuireann an naíonra féin ar fáil. Mar sin, sa chaibidil seo iniúchtar na róil a bhaineann leis na saintréithe an pháiste aonair, le cúlra an teaghlaigh agus le saintréithe ar leibhéal an naíonra.

7.2 ANAILÍSÍ DÉ-ATHRÁIDE[1]:TORTHAÍ

I dTábla 7.1 tugtar achoimre ar na torthaí a bhain le roinnt anailísí 'dé-athráide' a léiríonn an éifeacht a bhíonn ag athróg neamhspleách amháin (mar shampla, suíomh Gaeltachta/ Galltachta) ar an athróg spleách (scór ghinchumas na Gaeilge). Úsáideadh an scór ginchumais toisc go raibh réimse níos leithne ag an scór sin ná mar a bhí ag an scór tuisceana, rud a lig do pháistí le hardchumas sa Ghaeilge a bhfeabhas a thaispeáint níos fearr. Tugann anailísí dé-athráide roinnt buneolais ar phríomh-dheitéarmanaint áirithe a bhaineann le scóir thástála. Ach dá úsáidí é an t-eolas seo chun réamhspléachadh a fháil ar a dtéann i bhfeidhm ar scóir thástála, tá teorainn ó nádúr le hanailísí dé-athráide. Ní chuireann siad san áireamh an idirghníomhaíocht idir athróga neamhspleácha, rud a dhéanann na hanailísí ilathráide a thuairiscítear i Mír 7.3.

I dteannta an réamheolais a thugann anailísí dé-athráide, úsáideadh iad chun comparáid a dhéanamh le torthaí Egan (1981). Ní féidir an chomparáid sin a iniúchadh sa tuarascáil seo, cheal spáis.

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[1] Bivariate analyses.

Tábla 7.1 Achoimre ar anailísí dé-áthráide

Athróg	*Achoimre ar thorthaí*
1. Aois	Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde i nginchumas na Gaeilge ag páistí a bhí níos sine.
2. Gnéas	Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde ag cailíní sa tuiscint, ach ní raibh aon difríocht sna scóir ar ghinchumas.
3. Cumas Cognaíoch Ginearálta	Is fearr cuid mhaith a chruthaigh na páistí i nginchumas na Gaeilge a raibh cumas cognaíoch ginearálta níos airde acu.
4. Gaeltacht	Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde sa ghinchumas ag páistí naíonra sa Ghaeltacht ná mar a bhí ag páistí naíonra sa Ghalltacht.
5. Teanga an bhaile	Bhí scóir níos airde sa tuiscint agus sa ghinchumas ag páistí ó theaghlach inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge amháin ná mar a bhí ag páistí ó theaghlach dátheangach. Bhí scóir níos airde arís sa ghinchumas ag páistí ó theaghlach dátheangach ná mar a bhí ag páistí ó theaghlach inar labhraíodh an Béarla amháin. Teaghlach Gaelach > teaghlach dátheangach > teaghlach Béarla
6. Teanga an bhaile de réir Gaeltachta agus Galltachta	Bhí scóir níos airde sa ghinchumas ag páistí ó theaghlach Béarla agus ó theaghlach dátheangach sa Ghaeltacht ná mar a bhí ag a gcomhghrúpaí de pháistí ó theaghlach Béarla nó ó theaghlach dátheangach sa Ghalltacht.
7. Gaeilge an Stiúrthóra	I naíonraí na Galltachta bhí scóir níos airde sa tuiscint ag páistí a raibh Stiúrthóir ar cainteoir dúchais í acu, nó Stiúrthóir ag a raibh cumas an chainteora dhúchais aici. Níorbh ann don éifeacht sin i naíonraí na Gaeltachta toisc cumas an chainteora dhúchais a bheith ag na Stiúrthóirí go léir.
8. Suíomh	Chruthaigh páistí i naíonraí i dtithe príobháideacha, i hallaí nó i scoileanna lánGhaeilge i bhfad níos fearr i dtuiscint na Gaeilge ná iad siúd i scoileanna Béarla. Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde i nginchumas na Gaeilge ag páistí naíonra i dtithe príobháideacha agus i hallaí ná acu siúd ina raibh an naíonra suite i scoileanna (scoileanna Gaeilge nó Béarla).
9. Líon na bpáistí	Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde i nginchumas na Gaeilge ag páistí i naíonra ag a raibh 15 páiste nó níos lú ná sin ná acu siúd i naíonraí níos mó.
10. Líon na bpáistí de réir na Galltachta	Bhí scóir roinnt mhaith níos airde sa tuiscint agus sa ghinchumas ag páistí i naíonraí Galltachta ina raibh níos lú ná 15 páiste ná acu siúd i naíonraí Galltachta níos mó.
11. Cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí	Níorbh ann d'éifeacht shuntasach do pháistí le cóimheasa daltaí is múinteoirí níos ísle.

7.3 ANAILÍSÍ ILATHRÁIDE: TORTHAÍ

D'fhéach na hanailísí dé-athráide ar gach comhceangal idir athróg neamhspléach agus na scóir ghinchumais mar chás aonair. Chun an idirghníomhaíocht idir na hathróga a iniúchadh, ní mór anailísí ilathráide a dhéanamh. Ina leithéid de anailís, is féidir tionchar athróige amháin a mheas nuair atá éifeacht na n-athróg eile á rialú. Ar dtús, scrúdaíodh na comhghaolta idir na fachtóirí éagsúla. Roghnaíodh méid áirithe athróg (a bhí teoranta de réir na modhanna staitistiúla) agus deineadh anailís aischéimnithe, anailís ord-aischéimnithe agus anailís il-leibhéil orthu.

Thug an anailís aischéimnithe le fios go mbíonn mórthionchar ag na hathróga a leanas ar ghnóthachtáil na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge, de réir na scór a bhain leis an triail ghinchumais.

Cumas cognaíoch ginearálta
Cumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí
An Ghaeilge á labhairt leis an bpáiste agus é ina leanbh agus ina thachrán
Minicíocht úsáid na Gaeilge faoi láthair ag baile
Suíomh Gaeltachta
Gaeilge an Stiúrthóra
An naíonra suite i scoil
Líon na bpáistí sa seisiún naíonra (méid an ranga)

Dá bhrí sin, agus gach ní eile mar a chéile, d'fhéadfaí a bheith ag súil le scór an pháiste sa ghinchumas a bheith níos airde, ach:

> scór níos airde ná an meánscór a bheith aige sa tástáil ar chumas cognaíoch ginearálta; tuismitheoir amháin, ar a laghad, aige ag a raibh cumas ard, nó measartha aige sa Ghaeilge; gur labhraíodh Gaeilge leis agus é ina leanbh agus ina thachrán; go raibh méid áirithe Gaeilge á labhairt sa bhaile faoi láthair; go raibh cónaí air sa Ghaeltacht; go raibh Stiúrthóir aige a raibh eolas maith ar an nGaeilge aici, nó líofacht sa Ghaeilge aici; gur fhreastail sé ar naíonra nach raibh suite i scoil; gur fhreastail sé ar naíonra a bhí réasúnta beag.

Pléitear na fachtóirí sin uile anois leo féin.

7.3.1 Cumas Cognaíoch Ginearálta

Fáistineoir an-suntasach ba ea an cumas cognaíoch ginearálta maidir le scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas. Fuair Harris agus Murtagh (1991) amach freisin gur fáistineoir suntasach í intleacht bhriathartha i ngnóthachtáil na Gaeilge sa sampla acu de dhaltaí Rang a Sé.

Tá conspóid leanúnach ann mar gheall ar an ngaol idir éirim ghinearálta, oilteacht teanga agus infheidhmeacht teanga (féach, mar shampla, Skehan, 1990, Boyle, 1987, Gardner, 1985, Carroll, 1983, Oller agus Perkins, 1978). Phléigh Cummins (1984) na cúrsaí seo maidir leis an tumoideachas. Ós rud é go bhfuil comhcheangal idir an cumas cognaíoch ginearálta agus an dul chun cinn acadúil a dhéantar ar scoil, d'fhiosraigh sé (a) an mbeadh fadhbanna breise ag páiste lagchumasach i scoil tumtha nach mbeadh aige i ngnáthscoil; agus (b) an n-eireodh leis an bpáiste seo an T2 a fhoghlaim. Thaispeáin Cummins nach raibh an dul chun cinn acadúil i measc na bpáistí seo níos measa i scoil tumtha ná mar a bhí i measc páistí i ngnáthscoil. Ina theannta sin, léirigh taighde fad-ama a scrúdaigh sé ar dhaonraí tumtha i gCeanada nach mbíonn daltaí ag a bhfuil sainuimhir éirime íseal faoi mhíbhuntáiste i ndeireadh thiar i dtumadh Fraincise ó thaobh thoradh teanga de ach an oiread (Swain agus Lapkin 1982). Ach ceaptar go mbeidh na daltaí seo níos moille ar an meán sna céimeanna tosaigh i sealbhú an dara teanga ná daltaí ag a bhfuil cumas intleachta ard acu.

Mar sin, fiú má chuireann an naíonra an Ghaeilge chun cinn ar bhealach atá an-chomhthéacsaithe agus an-nádúrtha (ag iomaíocht, chomh fada agus is féidir laistigh de theorainneacha ama agus comhthéacs, le dálaí sealbhaithe na chéad teanga), ná glactar leis, mar sin, nach mbeidh tionchar láidir ar an rath ag na scileanna foghlama a sheasann don éirim ghinearálta. Ach ba chóir a thabhairt faoi deara chomh maith go ndearna páistí, a raibh scóir 'ísle' acu sa chumas cognaíoch ginearálta, dul chun cinn substaintiúil i dtuiscint na Gaeilge (meánscóir 53% i gcomparáid le thart ar 73% do pháistí ardchumais) sa staidéar seo. Tugann sin le fios gur moille é a ráta foghlama T2, ach ní hé nach leor é a gcumas iomlán chun an teanga a fhoghlaim, toisc go mbeadh feidhm ag fachtóirí eile a bhainfeadh le daltaí ardchumais agus daltaí lagchumais araon, mar shampla, inspreagadh agus teagmháil leis an teanga.

7.3.2 Cumas Gaeilge na dTuismitheoirí

Mhínigh cumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí 20% nach mór den athraitheas iomlán a b'fhéidir a mhíniú ar scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas san ord-aischéimniú. Bhain an athróg seo le céatadán níos mó den athraitheas mínithe ná athróg ar bith eile ar leibhéal an pháiste. Caithfear a mheabhrú nach ag brath ar a comhghaolú le hathróga eile amháin (ar nós cónaí sa Ghaeltacht nó labhairt na Gaeilge leis an bpáiste) atá éifeacht chumas na dtuismitheoirí sa Ghaeilge a léiríonn na staitisticí ilathráide, toisc go rialaítear athróga eile san anailís ilathráide chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar thionchar athróige aonair. Mar sin, fiú nuair a rialaítear na fachtóirí sin san anailís ilathráide, fanann tionchar chumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí suntasach ann féin fós.

Pléann Ó Riagáin (1997) an comhcheangal idir cumas sa Ghaeilge, stádas gairme agus an leibhéal oideachais i measc an daonra ghinearálta. Ardaíonn sin an cheist an raibh tionchar chumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí ag eirí go díreach as fachtóirí níos bunúsaí mar bhuntáistí socheacnamaíocha. Deineadh anailís bhreise ar an gceist seo, a thaispeáin narbh amhlaidh a bhí, ach go raibh fíorthionchar ag an gcumas sa Ghaeilge.

Níor tugadh mórán airde sa taighde idirnáisiúnta ar ról na dtuismitheoirí san oideachas tumtha; díríonn an taighde sin níos mó ar athróga ar leibhéil an ranga agus an chláir ná ar leibhéil an bhaile agus an phobail. Tugann gluaiseachtaí tumtha Cheanada agus na Breataine Bige, áfach, faoi na tuismitheoirí a thabhairt isteach in imeachtaí teanga agus i ranganna, agus faoi bhileoga agus leabhráin a chur ar fáil dóibh ina mbíonn taighde, cúlra agus treoir. Thug Gibson (1984) faoi deara, agus ról na dtuismitheoirí sa tumadh á phlé aige, gur spreagadh do thuismitheoirí is ea é páistí i dtumoideachas a bheith acu chun a gcumas sa sprioctheanga a fheabhsú, ionas go mbeidh siad in ann cabhrú leis an obair bhaile nó bheith gníomhach i scolaíocht a bpáistí. Léiríonn sin an tábhacht a bhaineann le tuismitheoirí tumoideachais in imeachtaí athbheochana teanga. Taispeánann an ceangal idir cumas na dtuismitheoirí agus scóir ghinchumais an tábhacht a bhaineann le ranganna Gaeilge a thairiscint do thuismitheoirí. Seans go n-éireodh níos fearr leis na ranganna sin agus go bhfreastalódh níos mó tuismitheoirí orthu dá ndíreodh siad níos mó ar an teanga atá á foghlaim agus á húsáid ag a gcuid leanaí sa tumadh, seachas na ranganna Gaeilge a chuirtear ar fáil don phobal i gcoitinne. Anuas ar sin, ba chóir na tuismitheoirí a ghríosú chun cur lena gcuid Gaeilge agus chun úsáid a bhaint as an gcumas atá acu sa Ghaeilge gach deis a fhaigheann siad lena gcuid páistí. Ní mór, leis, moltaí praiticiúla a chur ar fáil dóibh faoi conas úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile a mhéadú.

7.3.3 Teanga an Bhaile

Is ionann agus 16% den athraitheas mínithe iomlán san anailís ord-aischéimnithe í an athróg seo 'Gaeilge a labhraíodh leis an bpáiste agus é ina leanbh agus ina thachrán'. Leagann an athróg seo méar ar na cainteoirí dúchais Gaeilge i measc pháistí an tsampla, agus bheifí ag súil go míneodh an athróg seo codán mór d'athraitheas na scór ginchumais. Is fearr go maith a chruthaigh páistí arbh í an Ghaeilge teanga an bhaile acu sa tuiscint agus sa ghinchumas araon ná páistí ó theaghlach dátheangach, nó ó theaghlach Béarla amháin, rud a thabharfadh le fios gur aimsigh an tástáil scileanna teanga seachas díreach scileanna tástála ginearálta.

Athróg atá gaolmhar léi is ea 'Gaeilge agus Béarla a labhraíodh leis an bpáiste agus é ina leanbh agus ina thachrán'. Mhínigh an athróg sin 4% den athraitheas san anailís ord-aischéimnithe. Léirigh na torthaí go ndéanann teanga an bhaile difríocht shuntasach ó thaobh an ginchumais de: cruthaíonn páiste ó theaghlach dátheangach níos fearr ná an páiste ó theaghlach Béarla amháin. Seans go gcabhraíonn an teagmháil leis an nGaeilge sa bhaile sula dtosaíonn sé sa naíonra leis an bpáiste a chur ar a shuaimhneas agus an cúpla focal atá ar eolas aige a úsáid, agus imeacht ó 'chéim thostach' na foghlama go dtí céim ina dtugann sé faoi chumarsáid a dhéanamh le pé focail nó nathanna atá ar a chumas. Is fiú mar sin, tuismitheoirí a mhealladh chun méid áirithe Gaeilge, ar a laghad, a úsáid lena leanaí sa bhaile.

7.3.4 Úsáid Reatha na Gaeilge sa Bhaile

Bunaíodh an athróg seo ar thuairiscí na dtuismitheoirí ar an méid Gaeilge a bhí in úsáid acu lena bpáistí 'faoi láthair', is é sin, tar éis don pháiste tréimhse a chaitheamh sa naíonra (dhá théarma ar a laghad faoin am ar bailíodh na sonraí ó na tuismitheoirí). Thug na tuismitheoirí le fios cé acu ar labhair siad Gaeilge 'i gcónaí', 'go rialta', 'uaireanta', nó nár labhair siad 'riamh' í. Cé nach raibh aon athrú ar na tuismitheoirí a labhair Gaeilge i gcónaí leis an bpáiste, bhí méaduithe suntasacha ar úsáid na Gaeilge i measc tuismitheoirí eile ar na leibhéil 'uaireanta' agus 'go rialta' agus laghdú orthusan nár labhair Gaeilge 'riamh' lena bpáistí. Fuarthas amach go raibh tionchar nach beag ag éifeacht na húsáide seo ar an athraitheas mínithe san anailís ord-aischéimnithe ($p<.014$) ach nár fhan sé suntasach san anailís il-leibhéil, ar chúiseanna staitistiúla. Má tá tábhacht ag baint leis an athróg seo, is cruthú é gur gá tuismitheoirí a ghríosú chun pé méid Gaeilge atá acu a úsáid chomh minic agus is féidir, sa mhéid go bhféadfadh éifeacht a bheith ann maidir le tacaíocht an bhaile leis an teanga a foghlaimíodh sa naíonra.

7.3.5 Gaeltacht

Léirigh na hanailísí ilathráide go léir go raibh tionchar suntasach ag cónaí sa Ghaeltacht ar scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas. Ní mór an éifeacht seo a thuiscint agus í scartha ó theanga an bhaile (rud a scrúdaíodh sna hathróga a pléadh cheana); ina áit sin, baineann an éifeacht seo le tionchar úsáid an phobail amháin ar ghinchumas Gaeilge an pháiste. Ní thagann an toradh seo le torthaí Egan (1981:51). Cheap sise gur thaispeáin na sonraí a fuair sí ó shampla beag de pháistí naíonra go raibh 'comhghaolú diúltach tríd is tríd idir an Ghaeltacht ... agus gnóthachtáil na bpáistí sa Ghaeilge'. Ina áit sin, léirítear sa staidéar seo gur scóráil páistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht roinnt mhaith níos airde sa ghinchumas ná iad siúd sa Ghalltacht, nuair a rialaíodh athróga eile, mar shampla, cumas cognaíoch ginearálta, teanga an bhaile, cumas na dtuismitheoirí etc. Thuigfí as sin gurb ann go follasach d'éifeacht shuntasach teanga an phobail a fheidhmíonn neamhspleách ar athróga eile a bhí faoi chaibidil againn cheana.

7.3.6 Cumas Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí[1]

Léirigh an anailís ord-aischéimnithe gurb ionann agus 9% den athraitheas iomlán mínithe é Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí. Léirigh an anailís aischéimnithe leathnaithe go raibh éifeacht níos láidre fós ag cumas Gaeilge an Stiúrthóra ar naíonraí Galltachta. Is féidir a thuiscint ón éifeacht shuntasach sin a lárnaí is atá an Stiúrthóir mar phríomhfhoinse ionchur na Gaeilge. Thaispeáin an t-aischéimniú má bhí cumas 'maith' ar a laghad sa Ghaeilge ag Stiúrthóirí gur scóráil na páistí aici roinnt mhaith níos airde sa ghinchumas ná i gcás Stiúrthóirí nach raibh ach Gaeilge 'lag' nó 'sásúil' acu. San iomlán, ba sna catagóirí ísle seo i gcumas na Gaeilge a bhí 18% de na Stiúrthóirí (agus suas le 43% de na Stiúrthóirí Cúnta). Léiríonn na torthaí seo go soiléir an leas a d'fhéadfaí baint as iarracht a dhéanamh ar chaighdeán Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí seo a ardú go dtí an meánleibhéal ar a laghad.

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[1] Ba í an Comhairleoir a mheas cumas Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí uile, ar bhonn rialta, agus ar scála cúig phointe ó 'lag/ag dul i bhfeabhas', go 'sásúil', 'maith', 'cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas' agus 'cainteoir ó dhúchas'. Ghrádaigh na Stiúrthóirí a gcumas féin chomh maith ar an scála céanna sa cheistiúchán, agus ba bheag difríocht a bhí idir an féinmheasúnú agus measúnú an Chomhairleora. Beartaíodh, áfach, ar mhaithe leis an oibiachtúlacht ab fhearr amuigh, cloí le grádú an Chomhairleora san athróg seo.

Níl an oiread sin taighde déanta laistigh den litríocht tumtha ar cheist chumas teanga na múinteoirí, cé go bhfuil raidhse scríofa ar ról na múinteoirí mar ionchur aonair sa sprioctheanga. Faightear tuairim thall is abhus, áfach, ar líofacht an mhúinteora i dtaca le ganntanas múinteoirí tumtha de. Chuir Lapkin, Swain agus Shapson (1990) fiosrú ar ról an mhúinteora thumtha ar bharr chlár taighde ar thumadh Fraincise do na nóchaidí. Dhírigh Majhanovich agus Gray (1992) ar an tábhacht a bhaineann le tréimhse chleachtaidh san oideachas tum-mhúinteoirí ar leibhéal na bunscoile. D'aithin siad go mba chás leo thar aon ní eile sa staidéar acu líofacht teanga an ábhair mhúinteora, go fiú i ndiaidh an scagtha thosaigh, le deimhin a dhéanamh de go raibh dóthain eolais ar an bhFraincis ag gach rannpháirtí 'chun déileáil le timpeallacht tumtha sa Fhraincis' (l. 685). Thug Brine agus Shapson (1989) léargas ar chúrsa athoiliúna a bhí dírithe ar mhúinteoirí gníomhacha ar theastaigh uathu aistriú go tumadh, agus ba chuid lárnach de sin tréimhse 6 seachtaine a chaitheamh i dtimpeallacht lánFhraincise, agus teagasc breise sa Fhraincis i gcaitheamh na bliana acadúla go léir. I gcás na naíonraí, b'fhiú smaoineamh ar ardchúrsa breise mar é sa Ghaeilge a chur le bunoiliúint na Stiúrthóirí sin nach cainteoirí dúchais iad agus é a reáchtáil sa Ghaeltacht dá mb'fhéidir é.

Tá sé le tuiscint as an easpa idirdhealaithe idir cainteoirí dúchais, iad a bhfuil cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas acu agus iad siúd a bhfuil a leibhéal cumais 'go maith', nach bhfuil tionchar rómhór ag na difríochtaí sin ar scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas ar aon nós, ach gur gá líofacht mhaith ghinearálta sa Ghaeilge ar a shon sin. Bíonn gá ag na foghlaimeoirí sa naíonra le Stiúrthóirí líofa atá sách muiníneach as a gcuid Gaeilge chun í a labhairt de shíor gan dua leo, seachas í a labhairt go drogallach. Mar sin, ba mhaith ab fhiú dá bhféachfaí ar an meánleibhéal de chumas sa Ghaeilge mar íosleibhéal cumais riachtanach dóibh siúd go léir atá ag smaoineamh ar obair i naíonra agus go spreagfaí Stiúrthóirí agus Stiúrthóirí Cúnta atá ag feidhmiú cheana féin chun a gcaighdeán a fheabhsú go dtí an leibhéal sin ar a laghad nó, níos fearr fós, an leibhéal sin a shárú. Pléifear an cheist seo arís i gCaibidil 8.

7.3.7 Suíomh

Thug na hanailísí ilathráide le fios go mbíonn tionchar suntasach ag an suíomh ar dhul chun cinn an pháiste sa naíonra, sa mhéid gur scóráil páistí a d'fhreastail ar naíonra scoile (gnáthscoil nó scoil lánGhaelach) níos ísle, ar meán, sa ghinchumas ná iad siúd a d'fhreastail ar naíonra i dteach, nó i halla. B'fháistineoir diúltach ar scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas tríd síos é suíomh scoile sna hanailísí ilathráide go léir. Is ann i gcónaí d'éifeacht shuntasach dhiúltach an tsuímh scoile, fiú nuair a rialaítear líon na bpáistí sa rang agus athróga eile sna hanailísí ilathráide sa staidéar seo.

Fuair Osborn agus Milbank (1987) amach freisin go mba iad na grúpaí súgartha a bhí lonnaithe i scoil na suímh réamhscoile ba lú éifeacht dá sampla mór sa Bhreatain. Thuairiscigh siad nár chruthaigh páistí i ranganna naíolainne (faoin údarás áitiúil) atá lonnaithe i mbunscoileanna ina bhfuil páistí 5 bliana nó níos sine, móran níos fearr ná páistí nár fhreastail ar réamhscoil de shaghas ar bith, agus nach raibh puinn difríochta eatarthu sa staidéar fadtéarmach a lean. Deir Osborn agus Milbank mar fhocal scoir:

> Ar bhonn na dtorthaí seo is é ár dtuairim go raibh cuid de na páistí sa sampla againne ag freastal ar ranganna naíonán ar chosúla iad le rang glactha naíonán sa bhunscoil ná le rang i naíscoil.
> *(We suggest, on the basis of these results, that some children in our sample were attending nursery classes that were run more on the line of an infant reception class than a class in a nursery school.)*
>
> Osborn agus Milbank (1987:219)

Tharlódh sé go n-éiríonn éifeacht an tsuímh as idirghníomhaíocht le stíl mhúinteoireachta. D'fhéadfadh suíomh scoile dul i bhfeidhm ar an stíl mhúinteoireachta agus claonadh a bheith ag an naíonra aithris a dhéanamh ar stíl fhoirmiúil na ranganna sinsearacha, chomh maith le hiarracht ar challán nó ar shaorghníomhaíocht a mhaolú, chun nach gcuirfí isteach ar thimpeallacht foghlama na bpáistí sna ranganna eile. Ar an taobh eile den scéal, d'fhéadfadh go gcuireann an seomra ranga scoile, agus na hábhair ann, deis ar fáil níos mó gníomhaíochtaí aonair a dhéanamh, rud a d'fhéadfadh laghdú ar ionchur na Gaeilge a chuirfí ar fáil do na páistí mar ghrúpa. Ina theannta sin, seans go ndealraíonn an seomra ranga scoile bagrach, lena throscán feidhmiúil agus a fhairsinge, do pháiste réamhscoile, agus d'fhéadfadh an ruaille buaille ó dhaltaí níos sinsearaí, agus iad ag teacht is ag imeacht, cur isteach nó bagairt a dhéanamh ar lucht réamhscoile.

Thug Sylva *et al.* (1980:130) faoi deara ina staidéar gur geall le leathnú ar an mbaile a bhí sa ghrúpa súgartha lonnaithe i dteach ach gur fheidhmigh na ranganna naíolainne i mbunscoileanna, ina sampla siúd, níos mó ar nós ranganna scoile 'i gceart'. Tríd is tríd, tá sé suimiúl gur thug siad faoi deara ar na páistí réamhscoile a ndearna siad staidéar orthu nár chaith siad ach 5% dá gcuid ama i gcomhrá le duine fásta, agus gan ach 15% i gcomhrá le páistí eile. Áitíonn siad nach iad scileanna laga comhráite is cúis leis an nganntanas dialóige ag an aois sin ach na teorainneacha a bhí leagtha síos ag suíomh agus ag méid an ghrúpa. Baineann sé seo go mór leis na naíonraí, óir aidhm lárnach atá acu ná scileanna T2 a chothú. Tá obair cháilíochtúil bhreise ar siúl faoi láthair (Hickey, á ullmhú) chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar an minicíocht teanga agus ar an gcineál teanga atá in úsáid i bhfoshampla de naíonraí.

Caithfear a mheabhrú anseo gur bunaithe ar shampla beag naíonraí a bhí éifeacht an tsuímh a luaitear anseo (25 naíonra san iomlán, agus 10 naíonraí lonnaithe i scoil) inar cuireadh teist ar 225 páiste. Mar sin, is trialach i gcónaí iad na tátail a bhaineann le héifeachtaí suímh. Mar sin féin, de bhrí go dtacaíonn an cinneadh seo le toradh Egan (1981) ar na naíonraí, is é sin, scóir níos ísle sa Ghaeilge ó pháistí i naíonra scoile ná mar a bhí i naíonra baile, agus go dtacaíonn staidéar le sampla níos mó de-chuid Osborn agus Milbank leis, chomh maith le tuairimí Sylva *et al.* (1980), tá comhthacaíocht sheachtrach éigin ann don tuairim seo. Is léir go gcaithfear monatóireacht bhreise a dhéanamh ar éifeacht an tsuímh ar rath an pháiste sa naíonra sa taighde a dhéanfar amach anseo. Idir an dá linn, b'fhiú iarracht a dhéanamh an suíomh scoile agus an stíl idirghníomhaíochta ann a dhéanamh chomh cosúil leis an mbaile agus is féidir. Moltar a choinneáil ar aigne go bhféadfadh buntáiste a bheith ag baint leis an naíonra atá lonnaithe sa bhaile, nó i halla, agus naíonraí nua á gcur ar bun. Tharlódh go mbeadh gá le monatóireacht éigin agus athluacháil a dhéanamh ar an athrú polasaí a chuir An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta i bhfeidhm le déanaí agus a spreag naíonraí nua chun ionaid phoiblí a roghnú (scoileanna agus hallaí agus mar sin de) seachas tithe príobháideacha. Tugann an polasaí seo faoi bhéim a leagan ar ról an naíonra sa phobal agus cur lena leanúnachas ach, ar bhonn na dtorthaí seo, dhealródh sé má chuirtear in aghaidh na naíonraí baile go bhféadfadh meath a theacht, ar an drochuair, ar cheann de na suímh foghlama is fearr a oireann do pháistí óga. Tuigtear, leis, go gcruthaíonn an tAcht um Chúram Leanaí fadhbanna eile anois do naíonraí i dtithe príobháideachha ach go háirithe, maidir le riachtanais i leith dóiteáin agus sábháilteachta srl. a shásamh, a dhéanann suíomh eile níos éasca don Stiúrthóir atá ag bunú naíonra. Ach taispeánann na torthaí seo gur fiú smoineamh i gcónaí ar naíonra a choimeád cosúil leis an mbaile, agus gan dul i dtreo an rang naíonán.

7.3.8 Líon na nDaltaí agus an Cóimheas Múinteoirí is Daltaí

Thug na torthaí aischéimnithe le fios go raibh éifeacht shuntasach ar scóir na leanaí sa ghinchumas ag líon iomlán na ndaltaí ach nach raibh an éifeacht sin ag an gcóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí. Fuarthas amach gur sa Ghalltacht is mó a bhí éifeacht dhiúltach seo líon na ndaltaí, an áit ina bhfuil móramh na naíonraí móra. Thabharfadh na torthaí il-leibhéil le fios go gcaithfear a bheith cúramach agus an toradh iomlán á mheas, ach dhealródh sé go n-íslíonn na naíonraí móra scóir na bpáistí i nginchumas na Gaeilge, laistigh den Ghalltacht, ar aon chuma. Léirigh torthaí Dhaonáireamh na Naíonraí go raibh sé pháiste déag, nó níos mó, ag breis is an tríú cuid de na naíonraí (36.3%). Nuair a fhéachtar ar éifeacht líon na bpáistí, dhealródh sé gurbh fhiú tabhairt faoi líon na naíonraí móra a laghdú a oiread agus is féidir.

Is iomaí míniú a tugadh ar éifeacht dhiúltach líon na bpáistí a bheith ag feidhmiú neamhspleách ar an gcóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí. Fuair Howes, Phillips agus Whitebrook (1990) amach sa staidéar mór a rinne siad ar pháistí i réimse dálaí cúraim lae, go raibh comhcheangal diúltach ag méid an ghrúpa le gníomhaíochtaí a bhí oiriúnach don fhorás; is é sin, fuair siad amach i gcás páistí a bhain le grúpaí ina raibh níos mó ná 18, gur lú a dtaithí ar chúram cuí agus ar imeachtaí a bhí oiriúnach dá bhforás ná páistí i ngrúpaí níos lú. Is é an míniú a thug na húdair ar an gceangal idir líon níos lú daltaí agus gníomhaíochtaí a bhí oiriúnach dá bhforás á gcur ar fáil ná go raibh múinteoirí i ngrúpaí níos lú in ann cúram aonair a chur ar fáil, ligean do pháistí bogadh thart sa seomra gan laincis orthu, agus eagar a choimeád i dtreo is nach gcuirfí isteach ar na páistí agus ar a gcuid imeachtaí. Ag tagairt don mhír a bhain le suíomh na réamhscoile, d'fhéadfaí a rá gur mó is cosúla leis an mbaile an grúpa beag, agus gur mó is cosúla leis an scoil an grúpa mór. Chomh maith leis sin, b'fhéidir go laghdaíonn an callán sa ghrúpa mór an t-ionchur Gaeilge atá ar fáil sa timpeallacht ag an bpáiste naíonra.

Cé gur follasach gur aidhm fhiúntach is ea í líon na ndaltaí agus na cóimheasa a choimeád íseal, is fiú a mheabhrú, ar mhaithe le béim a chur ar luach na réamhscolaíochta i gcoitinne, go bhfuil go leor den 56% (Staitisticí na Roinne Oideachais

1992-1993:3) de pháistí 4 bliana a thosaíonn ar scoil i ranganna ina bhfuil 30 páiste in aghaidh an aosaigh, agus is é an cóimheas do Naíonáin Shóisearacha i ngnáthscoileanna agus i nGaelscoileanna áirithe ná an t-uaslíon 35:1. Léiríonn staitisticí oideachasúla don bhliain 1992-1993 go raibh 49% de pháistí, ar Naíonáin Shóisearacha iad an bhliain sin, i ranganna ina raibh 30 nó níos mó, agus 54% de pháistí sna Naíonáin Shinsearacha.

Tagraíonn an chuid is mó den taighde ar líon na ndaltaí do na cóimheasa daltaí is múinteoirí (CDM) chomh maith. Agus na cóimheasa sin faoi chaibidil ag Lewis (1993), áitíonn sí gurbh fhearr ar fad nach mbeadh an cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí níos mó ná 10 in aghaidh 1. Go deimhin, thug Howes *et al.* (1990) faoi deara sa staidéar acu go raibh 'comhcheangal idir caighdeán Chalifornia 8:1 do lucht réamhscoile le leibhéil níos airde de chúram cuí ná caighdeán 9:1 an FIDCR' (l. 23). Áitíonn siad, mar sin, dá laghdófaí an CDM de pháiste amháin, fiú, go ndéanfadh sé difríocht ó thaobh chaighdeán an chúraim leanaí a chuirfí ar fáil.

Sa staidéar seo, áfach, ní athróg shuntasach san anailís ord-aischéimnithe é an CDM. Is é an tátal a bhaintear as an anailís seo nach leor é an cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí a láimhsiú chun go mbeadh an teacht céanna ag páistí i ngrúpaí móra agus ag páistí i ngrúpaí beaga ar dhuine fásta, sa mhéid gur chosúil éifeacht iomlán a bheith ag líon na ndaltaí, beag beann ar an CDM. Deineadh tionscadal mór ar a dtugtar STAR in Tennessee na Stát Aontaithe agus fuarathas amach (Achilles et al. 1993) chomh maith, nár leor é an CDM a fheabhsú chun éifeacht dhiúltach líon ard na ndaltaí a shárú (sa chás seo os cionn 22 páiste), sa ghrúpa páistí acusan ó chiondargairdín go dtí aois 8. Cé go bhfuil conspóid fós faoin taighde idirnáisiúnta ar éifeacht líon na ndaltaí, mar sin féin, tá fianaise anois ann, a bhaineann leis na blianta luatha ach go háirithe, gur maith iad na ranganna beaga do pháistí le gnóthachtáil acadúil íseal, chun gnóthachtáil a fheabhsú sa léamh agus sa mhatamaitic ar ball.

Ó bailíodh na sonraí seo tá cóimheas deichniúr páistí in aghaidh an Stiúrthóra leagtha síos do naíonraí, de bharr riachtanais árachais agus an Achta um Chúram Leanaí (agus duine fásta eile ar an mball chomh maith)[1]. Ceaptar ó thorthaí an staidéir seo nach leor é an CDM a laghdú chun cur in aghaidh éifeacht dhiúltach líon na ndaltaí, éifeacht a leanann fiú má rialaítear an CDM sna tástálacha staitistiúla. Dhealródh sé go mba éifeachtaí mar straitéis é díriú ar líon na ndaltaí a choimeád faoi bhun 15, ar a laghad, ná tabhairt faoi laghdú a dhéanamh ar an gcóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí amháin. Sa naíonra, faoi mar a luadh cheana, tá an scéal beagán níos casta fós: d'fhéadfadh nach leor é cumas Gaeilge an dara (nó an tríú) Stiúrthóir Cúnta, a cuireadh ar fáil chun an cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí a laghdú, chun ligean don duine sin idirghníomhú ar a socracht leis na páistí trí mheán na Gaeilge. An toradh a bheadh air sin, is dócha, ná ionchur Gaeilge laghdaithe nó gan é a bheith oiriúnach do na páistí atá ag brath ar Chúntóir dá leithéid sa ghrúpa mór.

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[1] Ina theannta sin, leagann an tAcht um Chúram Leanaí síos uasuimhir de 20 páiste réamhscoile in aon seomra amháin.

7.4 ACHOIMRE AGUS CONCLÚIDÍ

Léirigh anailísí ilathráide, a chuireann san áireamh an comhghaolú idir na fachtóirí éagsúla a théann i bhfeidhm ar an bpáiste go raibh baint lárnach ag na hathróga a leanas le gnóthachtáil an pháiste sa tástáil ar ghinchumas na Gaeilge:

cumas cognaíoch ginearálta,
cumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí,
an Ghaeilge mar theanga an bhaile,
minicíocht reatha úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile,
suíomh Gaeltachta,
Gaeilge an Stiúrthóra,
naíonra lonnaithe i scoil agus
líon na bpáistí sa seisiún naíonra.

Pléadh na hathróga seo ar a seal. Is cosúil go spreagann cumas cognaíoch ginearálta níos airde dul chun cinn an pháiste i nginchumas T2, ach déanann páistí, ar lú ná sin a gcumas, dul chun cinn suntasach sa tuiscint i gcaitheamh a dtréimhse sa naíonra. Téann cumas Gaeilge na dtuismitheoirí i bhfeidhm ar an rogha teanga sa bhaile agus baint aige chomh maith le stádas socheacnamaíoch agus leibhéal oideachais na dtuismitheoirí, ach bhí éifeacht shuntasach ag baint leis ann féin, fiú nuair a rialaíodh na hathróga eile. Nuair is í an Ghaeilge teanga an bhaile, sonraíonn sin na cainteoirí dúchais Gaeilge i measc na bpáistí, ach chomh maith leis sin, bhí fianaise ann buntáiste a bheith ag an bpáiste ón teaghlach dátheangach sna torthaí a bhain le ginchumas agus tuiscint. Ón éifeacht a bhaineann le minicíocht reatha úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile, is léir go gcaithfear tuismitheoirí a spreagadh chun tacú chomh mór agus is féidir leo le sealbhú Gaeilge an pháiste sa naíonra, trí úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile a mhéadú. Léiríonn éifeacht dheimhneach an tsuímh Ghaeltachta, agus athróga eile ar nós teanga an bhaile á rialú, tionchar buan úsáid teanga an phobail. Feictear an gá atá le gach Stiúrthóir, agus na Cúntóirí, a thabhairt go dtí meánleibhéal cumais sa Ghaeilge, ar a laghad (agus leibhéal níos mó fós dá m`bhféidir é) ón tionchar atá ag cumas Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí ar scóir na bpáistí sa ghinchumas. Fuarthas éifeacht dhiúltach sa sampla seo le lonnú naíonraí i scoileanna, (agus athróga eile mar líon na ndaltaí á rialú) rud a thabharfadh le fios go mb'fhiú féachaint ar na buntáistí a d'fhéadfadh a bheith le suímh eile, agus naíonraí nua á gcur ar bun, chomh maith le féachaint chuige an suíomh scoile agus an stíl idirghníomhníochta a dhéanamh chomh cosúil leis an mbaile agus is féidir don pháiste réamhscoile. Mar fhocal scoir, tugann éifeacht dhiúltach líon na ndaltaí le fios gur fachtóir is ea é seo nach féidir a shárú trí líon na ndaoine fásta sa rang a mhéadú agus é sin amháin, ach gur fearr líon na ndaltaí a laghdú.

Caibidil 8

Achoimre agus Conclúidí

8.1 Réamhrá

Is é a dhéantar sa chaibidil seo i dtosach ná athbhreithniú ar gach caibidil den staidéar agus achoimre a dhéanamh ar chuid de na príomhthorthaí. Scrúdaítear ansin na tosaíochtaí le haghaidh forbairt na naíonraí amach anseo, ag féachaint ar ról na Stiúrthóirí, na dtuismitheoirí agus an Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta, i bhfeidhmiú éifeachtach na naíonraí. Breathnaítear chomh maith ar fheidhmiú na naíonraí i gcomhthéacs obair eagraíochtaí eile.

Soiléiríonn an tuarascáil seo go mbíonn teacht, tríd is tríd, ag páistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonraí in Éirinn ar réimse leathan d'imeachtaí aoisoiriúnacha spreagúla laistigh de thimpeallacht thacúil. Déanann an chuid is mó acu an chéad teagmháil leis an nGaeilge mar T2 ansin agus is teist ar dhúthracht agus ar dhícheall na Stiúrthóirí é an dul chun cinn a dhéanann siad i dtuiscint agus i nginchumas na Gaeilge sna naíonraí. Bíonn tuismitheoirí thar a bheith sásta le taithí na bpáistí ar an naíonra. Tacaíonn tuismitheoirí leis an sealbhú a dhéanann na páistí ar an nGaeilge agus tuairiscíonn siad go n-úsáideann siad an Ghaeilge níos minice ag baile tar éis dá bpáistí tosú ar naíonra. Tríd is tríd, cuireann an naíonra seirbhís luachmhar ar fáil do pháistí ar mian lena dtuismitheoirí go sealbhóidís an Ghaeilge, nó go gcuirfidís feabhas ar an nGaeilge atá acu ag aois óg agus déantar amhlaidh laistigh den fhorbairt ghinearálta a chur chun cinn. Faraor, níl an réamhscolaíocht tri mheán na Gaeilge mar rogha ag cách ach dá n-infheisteofaí amach anseo i seirbhís na naíonraí thiocfadh le níos mó páistí freastal ar naíonraí d'ardchaighdeán. Chabhródh sin le hoibrithe dúthrachtacha na gluaiseachta seo leanúint orthu agus an tseirbhís luachmhar a chur ar fáil ar bhonn níos leithne, agus thabharfadh sé deis dóibh, chomh maith, a scileanna a fhorbairt i gcomhthéacs níos mó tacaíochta ón oideachas Stáit agus ó chomhlachtaí Gaeilge.

8.2 An Réamhscolaíocht In Éirinn agus an Luath-Thumadh (Caibidil 1)

Léirigh Caibidil 1 go bhfuil an-éileamh ar sheirbhísí réamhscolaíochta sa stát, ag éirí as athruithe sa tsochaí, cuir i gcás méadú ar rannpháirtíocht na mban pósta sa líon saothair agus tuiscint níos fearr a bheith ag an bpobal do na buntáistí a bhaineann leis an réamhscolaíocht. Tacaíonn an rath atá ar chláir thumtha go hidirnáisiúnta le héileamh seo na dtuismitheoirí ar réamhscolaíocht agus ar bhunscolaíocht trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Sa chur chuige oideolaíoch a mholtar do na naíonraí, cuirtear béim ar thábhacht an spraoi chomh maith le réimse imeachtaí a thagann le forbairt an pháiste, agus cuirtear dóthain Gaeilge ar fáil i gcónaí chun cur síos ar riachtanais, ar theastálacha agus ar ghníomhaíochtaí an pháiste. Is é bunchloch fealsúnachta an naíonra mar sin ná gur chóir scileanna foriomlána an pháiste a chur chun cinn, na scileanna sóisialta, cognaíocha, luaileacha agus pearsanta, fad is a gcabhraítear leo an Ghaeilge a shealbhú. Is é an Béarla teanga an teaghlaigh ag formhór na leanaí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonra, mar sin is ag na luathchéimeanna ar fad de shealbhú T2 a bhíonn siadsan. Mar sin féin, bíonn roinnt leanaí, leis, ann a mbíonn taithí éigin acu ar an nGaeilge sa bhaile agus roinnt eile, sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghalltacht araon, nach labhraíonn ach an Ghaeilge sa bhaile, agus i gcás na leanaí sin ní mór don naíonra saibhriú teanga ina gcéad teanga a sholáthar dóibh, ag leibhéal a oireann do na leibhéil éagsúla cumais atá acu sa Ghaeilge.

Tá an-chuid taighde déanta ar an luath-thumadh i dtíortha eile. B'fhiú cur leis an teaghmháil leis na gluaiseachtaí luath-thumtha, mar shampla sa Chatalóin agus sa Nua Shéalainn, chomh maith leis an mBreatain Bheag agus i dtíortha eile na hEorpa, chun comhoibriú le riachtanais na bpáistí, na Stiúrthóirí agus na dtuismitheoirí a fhreagairt.

8.3 DAONÁIREAMH NA NAÍONRAÍ (CAIBIDIL 2)

Léirigh Daonáireamh na naíonraí gur fhreastail thart ar 2,600 leanbh ar 190 seisiún naíonra sa bhliain 1992-93, arna rith ag 174 Stiúrthóir (a raibh níos mó ná seisiún amháin in aghaidh an lae á reáchtáil ag cuid acu) agus 90 cúntóir. Ba i hallaí agus i bhfoirgnimh phoiblí eile a bhí formhór na naíonraí lonnaithe, agus breis is an ceathrú cuid i dteaghlaigh phríobháideacha, agus an ceathrú cuid i scoileanna. Bhí 15 leanbh nó níos lú ag beagnach a dhá dtrian de na naíonraí go léir sa bhliain 1992-93, ach bhí 16 leanbh nó níos mó ag an trian eile. Bhí cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí suas le 10 leanbh in aghaidh an aosaigh ag thart ar thrí cheathrú díobh agus cóimheas breis is 10 leanbh in aghaidh an aosaigh ag an gcuid eile. Ba de theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Béarla amháin formhór na leanaí a bhí ag freastal ar naíonraí agus níor de theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge amháin ach timpeall an ceathrú cuid de leanaí na Gaeltachta. Ba de theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Ghaeilge agus an Béarla araon iad an séú cuid de pháistí na Galltachta agus an tríú cuid de pháistí na Gaeltachta a bhí ag freastal ar naíonra.

Tar éis do mhóramh na leanaí thart ar dhá théarma a chaitheamh i naíonra (agus suas le cúig téarma i gcás an 19% a raibh an dara bliain á chaitheamh i naíonra acu), rinne na Stiúrthóirí meastóireacht ar na scileanna Gaeilge a bhí ag breis agus 2,000 leanbh i nDaonáireamh na naíonraí. Is é a thuairiscigh siad go raibh 'cumas maith' sa Ghaeilge ag 14% de leanaí naíonra na Galltachta, agus 42% de leanaí naíonra na Gaeltachta; bhí nach mór a leath eile de leanaí naíonra na Galltachta, agus beagnach an tríú cuid de leanaí naíonra na Gaeltachta, in ann roinnt nathanna Gaeilge, ar a laghad, a sholáthar agus bhí an chuid is mó den chuid eile in ann roinnt focal Gaeilge a úsáid, agus gan ach mionlach nach raibh acu ach tuiscint don Ghaeilge.

8.4 PRÓIFÍL NA dTUISMITHEOIRÍ (CAIBIDIL 3)

Aithnítear ról lárnach a bheith ag tuismitheoirí i ngluaiseacht athbheochana, i dtumchláir a thionscnamh agus i leathnú úsáid na sprioctheanga. Chuir ceistiúcháin ó bhreis is 1,800 teaghlach eolas déimeagrafach ar fáil ar an dá thuismitheoir nuair ba chuí sin, ar a ngrúpálacha gairme agus ar a leibhéil oideachais, chomh maith lena gcumas sa Ghaeilge agus a gcúlra teanga. Ba sa Ghaeltacht a bhí cónaí ar thart ar an gceathrú cuid de na freagróirí agus an chuid eile sa Ghalltacht.

Bíonn thart ar a leath de na máithreacha naíonra ag obair lasmuigh den bhaile (go lánaimseartha nó go páirtaimseartha) agus tá sin nach mór a dhá oiread níos airde ná codán na máithreacha oibre i measc daonra máithreacha leanaí óga i gcoitinne (mar a léiríonn an foghrúpa cuí sa suirbhé náisiúnta 1987 de chuid an ESRI). Tá seans níos mó gairm neamhláimhe a bheith ag na haithreacha agus ag na máithreacha a roghnaíonn naíonra Galltachta dá leanbh, nó iad a bheith féinfhostaithe, ná aithreacha is máithreacha na Gaeltachta agus an daonra i gcoitinne. Is dóchúla ná a mhalairt tuismitheoirí naíonra a bheith ag obair san earnáil phroifisiúnta/bhainisteoireachta nó san ard-státseirbhís ná sampla inchomparáide leo de thuismitheoirí sa daonra i gcoitinne a bhfuil páistí acu faoi bhun cúig bliana, rud a thugann le fios go bhfuil seans níos mó go gcuirfeadh tuismitheoirí ó ghrúpálacha gairme ardstádais a gcuid leanaí chuig naíonra. Mar sin féin, is fiú a mheabhrú go mbaineann thart ar an tríú cuid d'aithreacha naíonra agus an ceathrú cuid de mháithreacha naíonra le gairmeacha láimhe seachas an fheirmeoireacht.

Léiríonn sonraí oideachais go bhfuil cáilíocht Ardteistiméireachta ag cuid mhaith níos mó tuismitheoirí naíonra ná sa daonra i gcoitinne agus tá oideachas tríú leibhéil ag níos mó tuismitheoirí naíonra. Dá réir sin, tá ionadaíocht cuid mhaith níos fearr ag tuismitheoirí a bhfuil ardoideachas orthu i measc na ndaoine a roghnaíonn naíonra dá bpáiste ná i measc daonra ginearálta na dtuismitheoirí. Ach ní scothaicme ó thaobh oideachais de amach is amach iad, áfach, mar ní raibh an Ardteistiméireacht bainte amach ag beagnach an tríú cuid de na máithreacha naíonra agus an dá chúigiú cuid d'aithreacha naíonra.

Tá ardleibhéal cumais sa Ghaeilge ag níos mó tuismitheoirí naíonra ná mar atá i measc an daonra i gcoitinne, mar a fhaightear i suirbhé teanga ITÉ (1993). Tá seans níos fearr go mbeadh cumas maith sa Ghaeilge, nó cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas, ag tuismitheoirí na Galltachta a roghnaíonn naíonra dá bpáiste ná an daonra ginearálta. Mar sin féin, is mionlach de cheathrú as iomlán na dtuismitheoirí naíonra iad an codán a bhfuil cumas measartha nó ardchumas sa Ghaeilge acu (níl cumas measartha go cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas sa Ghaeilge ach ag an séú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, agus ag breis is a leath de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta). Ní raibh ach cumas lagmheasartha, ar a mhéid (in ann páirt a ghlacadh i 'gcodanna de chomhráite') ag thart ar an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta agus an cúigiú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta, agus cumas lag nó gan cumas ar bith sa Ghaeilge ag a leath de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, agus thart ar an gcúigiú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta. Mar sin, fiú amháin na tuismitheoirí sin nach bhfuil ardchumas sa

Ghaeilge acu, is dóigh leo gur eispéireas fiúntach luachmhar dá bpáistí é freastal ar naíonra.

Ba i dteaghlach nár úsáideadh Gaeilge ar bith ann a tógadh formhór thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta, agus ní raibh ach thart ar an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta ar de theaghlaigh iad inar úsáideadh an Ghaeilge i gcónaí. Tríd is tríd, ba de theaghlach inar labhraíodh an Béarla amháin (gan focail Gaeilge) breis is a leath de na tuismitheoirí naíonra. D'fhreastail formhór thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta ar bhunscoil agus ar mheánscoil arbh í an Béarla an meán teagaisc iontu, agus d'fhreastail móramh thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta ar bhunscoil lánGhaelach nó ar bhunscoil pháirt-Ghaelach, cé gur thit an codán sin go dtí thart ar an dá chúigiú cuid i gcás an mheánoideachais. Theastaigh ó mhóramh thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta agus thart ar an dá chúigiú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta a bpáiste a chur ar bhunscoil lán-Ghaelach, agus roghnódh thart ar an gceathrú cuid den dá ghrúpa scoil inar múineadh breis is ábhar amháin trí mheán na Gaeilge.

8.5 NA TUISMITHEOIRÍ AGUS AN NAÍONRA (CAIBIDIL 4)

I gCaibidil 4 scrúdaíodh na cúiseanna a bhí ag tuismitheoirí chun naíonra a roghnú dá bpáiste agus an teagmháil a bhí acu leis an naíonra. Roghnaigh an chuid is mó de na tuismitheoirí a bpáiste a chur ar naíonra ar chúiseanna teanga agus oideachais araon, ach ba ar chúiseanna teanga amháin a roghnaigh suas leis an gcúigiú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta (i gcomparáid le thart ar an deichiú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Gaeltachta), agus ba ar chúiseanna neamhtheanga/oideachais amháin a roghnaigh an cúigiú cuid de na tuismitheoirí naíonra go léir. Shíl an chuid is mó de na tuismitheoirí go raibh an réamhscolaíocht trí mheán na Gaeilge an-tábhachtach do pháiste má bhí na tuismitheoirí meáite ar é/í a chur chuig bunscoil lánGhaelach.

Thuairiscigh na tuismitheoirí nach raibh an Ghaeilge mar theanga an teaghlaigh ach ag thart ar 1% de pháistí na Galltachta agus níos lú ná an ceathrú cuid de pháistí na Gaeltachta a bhí ag freastal ar naíonra, cé go raibh an Béarla agus an Ghaeilge cloiste sa bhaile ag thart ar an séú cuid eile de pháistí na Galltachta, agus an dá chúigiú cuid de pháistí na Gaeltachta. Chuir na tuismitheoirí in iúl go raibh níos lú ná an tríú cuid de pháistí naíonra na Gaeltachta in ann comhrá i nGaeilge, ar a laghad, a láimhseáil sular fhreastail siad ar naíonra, rud a thabharfadh le fios nach raibh dóthain teagmhála ag go leor páistí i dteaghlaigh ina raibh an dá theanga, chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid go táirgiúil.

Bhí tuismitheoirí thar a bheith sásta leis an gcinneadh a bhí déanta acu a bpáiste a chur ar naíonra agus tuairiscíodh formhór na bpáistí a bheith sona ann. Fuair breis is a leath de na tuismitheoirí ar fad amach go raibh páistí tosaithe ar fhocail Ghaeilge, ar rainn nó ar amhráin a úsáid ag baile ar bhonn rialta, agus thug tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta, ach go háirithe, faoi deara méadú ar chomhráite Gaeilge an pháiste. Ag freagairt don mhéadú seo ar úsáid Ghaeilge na bpáistí bhí méaduithe suntasacha ar úsáid Ghaeilge na dtuismitheoirí chomh maith. Ba dhóchúla faoi thrí go n-úsáidfeadh tuismitheoirí an Ghaeilge lena bpáiste i ndiaidh a dtréimhse sa naíonra ná mar a bhí sular fhreastail an páiste ar an naíonra, agus tháinig laghdú suntasach ar líon na ndaoine nár labhair an Ghaeilge riamh lena bpáistí sa bhaile.

Thuairiscigh tuismitheoirí naíonra i dteaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Béarla amháin, nó Béarla agus Gaeilge, rannpháirtíocht íseal, i gcoitinne, in imeachtaí Gaeilge ar nós a bheith ag éisteacht le Raidió na Gaeltachta, nó ag breathnú ar an Nuacht (ar RTÉ, roimh theacht TnaG), colúin Ghaeilge a léamh sna nuachtáin náisiúnta nó leabhair scéalta i nGaeilge a léamh dá bpáistí. Bhí níos lú ná a leath de thuismitheoirí naíonra na Galltachta a raibh turas tugtha acu ar an nGaeltacht sna ceithre bliana roimhe sin. Sa deireadh, bhí níos lú ná an cúigiú cuid a d'fhreastail ar ranganna Gaeilge, ar imeachtaí sóisialta Gaeilge, nó ar imeachtaí cultúrtha Gaeilge, agus d'fhéadfadh gur cuid den chúis atá leis sin ná gan iad a bheith ar fáil, chomh maith leis na deacrachtaí praiticiúla a bhainfeadh le páirt a ghlacadh sna himeachtaí sin nuair atá leanaí óga sa teaghlach.

Tríd is tríd, b'íseal go maith í rannpháirtíocht na dtuismitheoirí sa naíonra, agus d'fhéadfadh baint a bheith ag sin lena bheith gafa le cúrsaí oibre agus le cúrsaí eile an teaghlaigh, chomh maith le cumas íseal sa Ghaeilge i measc a lán de na tuismitheoirí. Níos lú ná a leath de na tuismitheoirí a d'fhreastail ar chruinniú tionscnaimh faoi obair an naíonra. Ba í príomhtheagmháil na dtuismitheoirí leis an naíonra ná an páiste a fhágáil ann agus a bhailiú gach lá, agus seiceáil ar dhul chun cinn an pháiste ar bhonn míosúil ar a laghad. Níor úsáid formhór na dtuismitheoirí leabhair ná téipeanna naíonra ag baile riamh. Thug na tuismitheoirí cur síos ar a gcuid riachtanas maidir le feabhas a chur ar an teagmháil a bhí acu leis an naíonra agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile.

8.6 SUIRBHÉ AR STIÚRTHÓIRÍ (CAIBIDIL 5)

Is é a lorg an suirbhé ar Stiúrthóirí ná eolas ar eagrú na naíonraí agus mionsonraí ar cháilíochtaí, ar thaithí agus ar chumas Gaeilge na Stiúrthóirí. Tugadh le fios go bhfaigheann nach mór an tríú cuid de na naíonraí fóirdheontas ó Údarás na Gaeltachta. I gcás fhormhór na naíonraí sin sa Ghaeltacht bhí táille £5 in aghaidh na seachtaine ar meán orthu, agus táille £8 ar meán i gcás na naíonraí neamhfhóirdheonaithe.

Bhain na Stiúrthóirí le réimse cúlraí, agus tá suas leis an séú cuid díobh cáilithe mar mhúinteoirí, ach braitheann a bhformhór acu ar an réamhchúrsa oiliúna a eagraíonn An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta ó thaobh oiliúna proifisiúnta de. Bhí taithí cúig bliana go deich mbliana ag thart ar a leath de na Stiúrthóirí, agus taithí aon bhliain déag nó níos mó ag ceathrú eile díobh, rud a léiríonn ráta meatha sách íseal. Bhí cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas, nó gar dó, ag breis is a leath de na Stiúrthóirí, i dtuairim na gComhairleoirí. Mar sin féin, beagnach an cúigiú cuid nach raibh ach 'sásúil' ar a mhéad ó thaobh na Gaeilge de. Ina theannta sai, tuairiscíodh Gaeilge 'lag' nó díreach 'sásúil' a bheith ag breis is an dá chúigiú de na Stiúrthóirí Cúnta.

Dhealródh sé gur dream an-díograiseach iad na Stiúrthóirí trí chéile, agus codán mór díobh a fhreastalaíonn go rialta ar chúrsaí inseirbhíse. Chruthaigh siad go raibh ardleibhéal spéise acu i gcúrsaí praiticiúla agus i réimsí níos leithne chomh maith, cuir i gcás ceisteanna sláinte agus an tsíceolaíocht. An cúnamh is mó a theastaíonn ó Stiúrthóirí ná a bheith in ann cuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile agus tacaíocht chun trealamh nua a cheannach. Bhí suas leis an gceathrú cuid de na Stiúrthóirí míshásta leis an leibhéal teagmhála a bhí acu le bunscoileanna áitiúla, cé go raibh sástacht níos mó le brath i gcás teagmháil leis na scoileanna áitiúla lánGhaelacha. Thuairiscigh móramh na Stiúrthóirí go bhfáilteoidís roimh thuismitheoirí ar theastaigh uathu cabhrú sa naíonra.

Maidir le heagrú na hoibre de, thuairiscigh an chuid is mó de na Stiúrthóirí plean seachtaine agus plean téarma a bheith acu, ach ní raibh plean bliana ag beagnach a leath díobh. Is iad na himeachtaí is coitianta a bhí ar fáil do na bpáistí gach lá i gcaitheamh an téarma dheireanaigh ná an cúinne baile, míreanna mearaí agus bloic thógála. Bhí an scéalaíocht agus grúpchluichí mar chuid de gnáthshaol an pháiste gach lá ag níos lú ná a leath de na naíonraí go léir. Mheas na Comhairleoirí gur chuir an séú cuid de na naíonraí an-rogha imeachtaí dea-eagraithe ar fáil, agus síleadh an móramh a bheith 'go maith' ar a laghad, ach bhí réimse scáinte imeachtaí ag thart ar an deichiú cuid, agus measadh an cúigiú cuid a bheith lag ó thaobh úsáid imeachtaí chun úsáid teanga a threisiú. San iomlán, thug na Comhairleoirí le fios go raibh thart ar 20% de na Stiúrthóirí ag feidhmiú 'ar fheabhas', agus 70% 'go maith' nó 'sásúil', agus gan ach thart ar 10% a bhí ag feidhmiú 'go lag'.

8.7 MEASÚNÚ TORTHAÍ NA dTRIALACHA (CAIBIDIL 6)

Forbraíodh tástálacha chun measúnú a dhéanamh ar ghnóthachtáil sa Ghaeilge ag páistí naíonra. Is é a bhí iontu ná tástálacha ar thuiscint, ar ghinchumas agus ar aithris. Anuas orthu sin, ceapadh triail ar chumas cognaíoch ginearálta. Tógadh sampla de 225 páiste as daonra iomlán na bpáistí i nDaonáireamh na Naíonraí, Feabhra 1993, agus ualaíodh an sampla seo chun go seasfadh sé do na naíonraí agus na páistí go léir sa daonra sin. Measadh na tástálacha seo a bheith ina n-ionstraimí bailí iontaofa.

Léirigh na scóir mháistreachta gur measadh íosdul chun cinn, ar a laghad, i dtuiscint na Gaeilge a bheith déanta ag na páistí go léir sa sampla, nach mór, (40% de na míreanna á phasáil acu), agus measadh go raibh dul chun cinn suntasach déanta ag thart ar a leath (75% de na teistmhíreanna á phasáil acu). Bhí na scóir ginchumais níos ísle, ach bhí íosdul chun cinn, ar a laghad, déanta ag breis is a leath den sampla sa triail sin, agus dul chun cinn suntasach déanta ag an séú cuid nó mar sin. Léirigh na scóir ar na tástálacha seo go raibh tuiscint agus aithris na bpáistí samplaithe chun tosaigh ar an nginchumas acu, an patrún forbartha a mbítear ag súil leis. Bhí tionchar ag teanga an teaghlaigh ar na scóir chomh maith, sa treo a rabhthas ag súil leis, agus scóir i bhfad níos fearr ag páistí ó theaghlaigh nach labhraítear ach an Ghaeilge iontu, seachas teaghlaigh ina labhraítear an Béarla agus an Ghaeilge iontu, agus iad sin níos airde arís ná scóir na bpáistí ó theaghlaigh nach labhraítear ach an Béarla iontu.

8.8 TIONCHAIR AR GHNÓTHACHTÁIL SA GHAEILGE (CAIBIDIL 7)

Léirigh anailís dé-athráide roinnt fachtóirí a chuaigh i bhfeidhm ar thorthaí na dtrialacha Ghaeilge a thaispeáin go raibh scóir ghinchumais cuid mhaith níos airde ag páistí níos sine agus ag páistí a raibh cumas cognaíoch ginearálta níos airde acu. Léirigh anailís dé-athráide chomh maith gur tionchar fabhrach ar scóir ginchumais sa Ghaeilge é cónaí a bheith ar pháiste sa Ghaeltacht, agus gurb é toradh ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile scóir ghinchumais níos airde sa Ghaeilge (agus buntáiste ag páistí ó theaghlaigh lánGhaelacha ar pháistí ó theaghlaigh dhátheangacha, agus buntáiste acu sin ar pháistí ó theaghlaigh inar labhraíodh an Béarla amháin). Chuaigh éifeacht theanga an teaghlaigh agus chónaí sa Ghaeltacht i gcion ar a chéile sa chaoi gur scóráil páistí na Gaeltachta níos airde ná páistí dá gcomhghrúpa teanga sa Ghalltacht.

Ag amharc dúinn ar fhachtóirí ar leibhéal an naíonra, léirigh anailís dé-athráide go raibh scóir níos airde sa tuiscint ag páistí má bhí cumas an chainteora ó dhúchas, nó gar dó, ag Stiúrthóirí. Bhí scóir cuid mhaith níos airde i nginchumas na Gaeilge ag páistí i naíonraí a bhí lonnaithe i dteaghlaigh phríobháideacha agus i hallaí ná acu siúd a bhí lonnaithe i scoileanna, agus scóir níos airde i nginchumas na Gaeilge ag páistí i naíonraí ag a raibh 15 páiste, nó níos lú, ná acu siúd i naíonraí níos mó. Níor léirigh anailís dé-athráide éifeacht shuntasach ar bith ar scóir sa Ghaeilge i gcás páistí i naíonra a raibh cóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí níos ísle ann.

In anailís dé-athráide ní fhéachtar ach ar an tionchar a bhíonn ag athróg amháin san iarraidh ar scór sa Ghaeilge. Is féidir le hanailís staitistiúil níos sofaisticiúla roinnt athróg a chur san áireamh ag an am céanna. Léirigh anailís ilathráide gurbh fhéidir na fachtóirí tábhachtacha is iontaofa dá bhfuil ann (ach idirghníomhaíochtaí idir fachtóirí difriúla a chur san áireamh) a roinnt ina ngrúpaí éagsúla, ar leibhéal an pháiste, an teaghlaigh agus an naíonra. Bhain an chuid is mó den athraitheas mínithe le leibhéal an pháiste agus an teaghlaigh, agus bhí na hathróga leibhéal an naíonra freagrach as thart ar an tríú cuid den athraitheas mínithe. Léirigh na hanailísí ilathráide seo, agus gach ní eile mar a chéile, go bhféadfaí a bheith ag súil le scór ginchumais sa Ghaeilge níos airde a bheith ag páiste dá mbeadh aige/aici:

- scór os cionn an mheáin sa teist ar chumas cognaíoch ginearálta;
- tuismitheoir amháin, ar a laghad, ag a raibh cumas measartha nó ardchumas sa Ghaeilge;
- taithí ar labhairt na Gaeilge agus é/í ina bhabaí agus ina thachrán;
- taithí an Ghaeilge a bhéith á húsáid ar a laghad uaireanta sa bhaile san am i láthair
- cónaí sa Ghaeltacht;
- Stiúrthóir a raibh eolas maith go líofa ar an nGaeilge aici;
- naíonra *nach* raibh lonnaithe i scoil;
- naíonra sách beag.

8.9 TOSAÍOCHTAÍ

Sna míreanna a leanas tugtar cuid de na príomh-mholtaí a d'éirigh as an tuarascáil, faoi chatagóir na n-eagraíochtaí nó na ngrúpaí cuí. Rinneadh na moltaí seo laistigh de chomhthéacs na n-eagraíochtaí agus na struchtúr faoi mar a fheidhmíonn siad faoi láthair, cé go nglactar leis go gcruthódh athruithe ó thaobh eagair féidearthachtaí eile. Tugtar na moltaí sin faoi cheannteidil ar leith ar mhaithe le soiléireacht, cé go nglactar leis go bhféadfadh tosaíochtaí eile, i gcásanna áirithe, a bheith ag na heagraíochtaí atá faoi chaibidil. Chun na moltaí seo a chur i bhfeidhm, theastódh maoiniú agus acmhainní breise ach is é a léirítear sa staidéar seo go mbeadh de thoradh ar an infheistíocht bhreise sin go gcabhródh sé le foghlaim na Gaeilge i measc páistí óga agus le húsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile a chur chun cinn.

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta

- Moltar go smaoineodh an Comhchoiste ar íosleibhéal cumais sa Ghaeilge a bhunú do Stiúrthóirí agus dá gcúntóirí, a chuirfí i bhfeidhm láithreach i gcás iarratasóirí nua, agus a thabharfaí isteach de réir a chéile i gcás na foirne reatha; ba ghá tacaíocht a sholáthar chun cuidiú leo an leibhéal Gaeilge acu a ardú go dtí leibhéal seo an íoschumais, ar a laghad. Tá moladh á scrúdú faoi láthair ag an gComhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta chun cúrsaí Gaeilge a chur ar fáil do Stiúrthóirí le linn gearrthréimhsí sa Ghaeltacht agus cuirtear fáilte roimh an moladh seo. Moltar go lorgfaí ciste le haghaidh méid áirithe scoláireachtaí do Stiúrthóirí agus do Stiúrthóirí Cúnta chun freastal ar chúrsaí Gaeilge gach bliain, rud a thabharfadh deis dóibh siúd a thiteann faoi bhun leibhéal an íoschumais sa Ghaeilge feabhas sách mór a chur ar a gcuid Gaeilge. Chuirfeadh sé seo go mór le héifeacht iomlán na naíonraí.

- Forbairt atá inmhianaithe agus riachtanach is ea na hiarrachtaí atá ar siúl faoi láthair ag an gComhchoiste ar chúrsa réamhsheirbhíse níos faide agus níos cuimsithí a bhunú, cúrsa a d'aithneodh institiúid tríú leibhéil. Tarlaíonn gur faoin tuath atá go leor daoine ar mhaith leo a bheith ina Stiúrthóirí agus cúraimí teaghlaigh orthu, moltar go mbeadh an rogha ann roinnt modúl, ar a laghad, den chúrsa seo a chur i gcrích trí mheán na cianfhoghlama (i.e. i gcomhthéacs ar nós na n-ollscoileanna oscailte). Tá tionscadal OMNA ag iarraidh caighdeán a leagan síos don oiliúnt ar chúram leanaí, chomh maith le modhanna solúbtha (mar chianfhoghlaim) chun cáilíochtaí breise a bhaint amach a sholáthar. Moltar go leanfadh An Comhchoiste lena chuid fiosruithe faoina leithéid. Chomh maith leis sin, tá córas APL ('Accreditation for Prior Learning') ag iarraidh aitheantas oifigiúil a fháil do na cáilíochtaí atá ag daoine áirithe maidir le cúram leanaí agus táthar ag súil go gcuirfí an córas sin i bhfeidhm chun go n-aithneofaí scileanna proifisiúnta agus taithí na Stiúrthóirí. Bheadh sé an-tábhachtach go ndéileálfadh codán maith den oiliúint réamhsheirbhíse leis an modheolaíocht agus leis na straitéisí is gá le haghaidh na tum-réamhscolaíochta. D'fhéadfaí, áfach, roinnt cúrsaí ar cheisteanna níos leithne, sláinte agus sábháilteacht nó bainisteoireacht, abair, a bhaineann le gach saghas réamhscolaíochta, a roinnt le cúrsaí do réamhscoileanna an Bhéarla.

- Ní mór modhanna múinte ar leith a úsáid agus meascán de imeachtaí ar leith a thairiscint do pháistí sa tum-réamhscolaíocht, agus is den tábhacht ar fad é dá réir sin, san oiliúint réamhsheirbhíse agus inseirbhíse araon, an bhéim a chur ar an gcothromaíocht a choimeád idir shaghsanna éagsúla imeachtaí, i dtreo is go bhfaigheadh páistí an naíonra an t-ionchur Gaeilge is fearr amuigh. D'fhonn an méid ionchuir Ghaeilge is oiriúnaí agus is mó a chur ar fáil, ní mór pleanáil ón mbonn aníos agus imeachtaí á n-eagrú. Sa chothromaíocht a bhaintear amach, ní mór íogaireacht a léiriú i dtaca leis an meascán teanga laistigh de ghrúpa áirithe, chomh maith leis an dinimic shóisialta idir na páistí agus an réimse eile riachtanas a gcaithfear freastal orthu sa naíonra. De bhrí gur casta an obair í seo tá gá le hoiliúint réamhsheirbhíse níos faide agus níos iomláine ná mar atá ar fáil faoi láthair, móide tacaíocht rialta ó oiliúint inseirbhíse.

- Moltar go rachadh sé chun leasa na hoiliúna inseirbhíse a bhfuil fáil uirthi faoi láthair ach eagrú éigin lárnach a bheith ar chúrsaí ar leith, a d'fhéadfaí a chur ar fáil ansin i réigiúin éagsúla. Tharlódh go dtabharfadh sé sin seans chun díriú ar riachtanais éagsúla na Stiúrthóirí ar bhonn níos éifeachtaí. Moltar freisin roinnt eolais a chur ar fáil ar fhístéip, tarlaíonn go mbíonn deacrachtaí ag roinnt Stiúrthóirí freastal ar chúrsaí, agus b'fhéidir na físeáin sin a úsáid i gcomhar le haoi-chainteoirí agus/nó Stiúrthóirí ag nochtadh tuairimí orthu ag cúrsaí inseirbhíse. B'fhiú smaoineamh, leis, ar an gcianfhoghlaim a úsáid i gcás na gcúrsaí inseirbhíse.

- Ba mhaith le breis is a leath de na Stiúrthóirí cuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile. Má tá cúiseanna praiticiúla ann nach féidir sin a shocrú, b'fhéidir teacht timpeall air trí físeáin de ghrúpaí difriúla a thaispeáint agus iad ag feidhmiú. D'fhéadfadh grúpa Stiúrthóirí é a phlé ina dhiaidh sin.

- Nuair a chuirtear san áireamh an éifeacht a bhíonn ag líon na ndaltaí sa rang ar na scóir a bhaintear amach sa Ghaeilge, moltar gur chóir tacaíocht a thabhairt don líon a laghdú go dtí 15 ar a mhéad, chomh maith leis an iarracht atá ar siúl faoi láthair ar an gcóimheas daltaí is múinteoirí a laghdú.

- Thuigfí ó thorthaí an staidéir seo (agus tacaíocht aige ó thaighde de chuid Osborn agus Milbank, 1987, agus Swain agus Lapkin, 1982) go bhféadfadh sealbhú na Gaeilge a bheith thíos leis, roinnt, nuair a lonnaítear naíonra i scoil. Ní mór a thuilleadh taighde a dhéanamh ar an ábhar seo ach, idir an dá linn, is é an polasaí reatha gan tacú le lonnú naíonraí i dtithe príobháideacha agus tacú le lonnaíocht scoile, polasaí ar gá machnamh arís ina thaobh agus monatóireacht a dhéanamh air, más amhlaidh gur fíor a ndeirtear faoi na míbhuntáistí thuasluaite. Moltar go ndéanfadh Stiúrthóirí naíonraí atá lonnaithe i scoileanna cheana féin gach iarracht an naíonra a dhéanamh níos cosúla leis an mbaile ná leis an rang scoile. D'fhonn teacht leis an Acht um Chúram Leanaí (Seirbhísí Réamhscolaíochta) 1996, caithfidh naíonraí rialacháin sábháilteachta, dóiteáin srl. a chomhlíonadh. Ba chásmhar an scéal é dá mbeadh de thoradh air sin laghdú ar líon na naíonraí a bheadh ag feidhmiú ag baile nuair a chuirtear san áireamh na torthaí fabhracha ar shuíomh baile sa staidéar seo agus i staidéir eile. Moltar go mbeadh deontas ar fáil chun suímh naíonraí atá ann cheana féin a chur in oiriúnt, ionas nach dtitfidh líon na naíonraí.

- Bíonn páistí a thagann ó mheascán de chúlraí teanga ag freastal ar go leor naíonraí, go háirithe sa Ghaeltacht (teaghlaigh ina labhraítear an Ghaeilge amháin mar shampla, nó Gaeilge agus Béarla, agus páistí ó na teaghlaigh sin ag meascadh le páistí ó theaghlaigh nach labhraítear ach an Béarla iontu). Moltar cur leis an oiliúint inseirbhíse i saibhriú teanga atá ar fáil, d'fhonn freastal ar riachtanais bhreise teanga na bpáistí sin a bhfuil an Ghaeilge sa bhaile acu. B'fhéidir an saibhriú sin a sholáthar ag am ar leith, roimh thús nó ag deireadh an tseisiúin naíonra gach lá, nó ar laethanta áirithe den tseachtain. Mar mhalairt air sin, dá mbeadh fáil ar Chúntóir b'fhéidir na páistí sin a thógáil ina ngrúpa ar feadh tamaill bhig le linn an ghnáthsheisiúin.

- Faoi láthair is beag ar fad iad na deiseanna atá ag Stiúrthóirí chun dul chun cinn proifisiúnta a dhéanamh, agus dá mbunófaí córas comhairleach mar aon leis an ngrád Sár-Stiúrthóir do na Stiúrthóirí ba mhó taithí agus éifeacht, thabharfadh sé sin aitheantas dá scileanna agus cuid éigin den idirghníomhaíocht sin le Stiúrthóirí eile atá ag teastáil uathu, rud a d'fhéadfadh cabhrú le Stiúrthóirí nua. Tá géarghá le stádas níos airde agus pá níos mó a chur ar fáil do Stiúrthóirí i gcoitinne ach dhealródh sé gur mall go maith a chuirfear sin i gcrích, agus beidh gá le ról níos mó a bheith ag an stát san oideachas réamhscolaíochta, chomh maith leis na cúrsaí nua oiliúna réamhsheirbhíse le creidiúnú atá á meas faoi láthair. Mar sin féin, dá ndéanfaí athmhachnamh ar théarmaí fostaíochta na Stiúrthóirí i ndiaidh dóibh clárú faoi na Riachalacháin an Acht um Chúram Leanaí, chuirfí go mór le tosca agus le meanma na ndaoine sin atá gafa leis an tseirbhís.

- Cuireann na Comhairleoirí an-seirbhís dheonach ar fáil agus iad ag feidmiú mar acmhainn ag na Stiúrthóirí trína gcuairteanna míosúla, trí chúrsaí inseirbhíse a chur ar fáil, trí chabhrú le naíonraí nua a bhunú agus trí cheangal a dhéanamh idir na Stiúrthóirí agus an Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta. Cuireann an grúpa dúthrachtach luathoideachasóirí seo réimse scileanna ar fáil do na Stiúrthóirí atá ina gceantar, agus is cúnamh riachtanach iad chun dul i ngleic le haonrú proifisiúnta na Stiúrthóirí agus chun ardchaighdeán a thionscnamh. Moltar go leanfadh na Comhairleoirí ar theagmháil fhoirmiúil agus neamhfhoirmiúil idir Stiúrthóirí a chothú. Moltar, leis, go mbuanófaí agus go dtacófaí le córas na gComhairleoirí agus go soláthrófaí 'oiliúnt do oiliúnóirí' dóibh, agus deiseanna chun cuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí i gceantair eile, i dtreo is go mbeidh siad in ann na spriocanna céanna a chur chun cinn.

- Tá an-ghá le tacú na dtuismitheoirí in obair na naíonraí. Moltar go n-ullmhódh an Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta nuachtlitir dhátheangach do thuismitheoirí in aghaidh an téarma, ina mbeadh eolas ar a bhfuil d'acmhainní Gaeilge ar fáil uaidh agus ó fhoinsí eile (fríosanna, leabhair, téipeanna, leabhair ar théip, leabhair rann agus amhrán, fiseáin) agus eolas faoi na himeachtaí agus faoin teanga a d'fhéadfadh a bheith in úsáid gach téarma sa naíonra. D'fhéadfadh tuismitheoirí áirithe gearrchuntas a scríobh ar na bealaí ina n-úsáideann siad féin an Ghaeilge sa bhaile, agus barrshamhail a bheadh ansin chun idirghníomhaíocht Ghaeilge éigin idir tuismitheoirí agus leanaí a léiriú. D'fhéadfaí nuachtlitir dá leithéid a scaipeadh ar gach naíonra ina mburlaí agus cóip di a thabhairt do gach páiste ag dul abhaile dóibh, chun an costas a choimeád síos.

- Moltar go smaoineodh an Comhchoiste ar ábhar 'féinmhúinte' sa Ghaeilge a choimisiúnú (chomh maith leis an leabhrán nathanna *BunGhaeilge do Thuismitheoirí* atá ar fáil cheana ó Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann), a bheadh dírithe ar thuismitheoirí a bhfuil cumas an-lag sa Ghaeilge acu, rud a chuirfeadh ar a gcumas plé a dhéanamh i nGaeilge ag baile ar imeachtaí an linbh. Chomh maith leis sin, d'fhéadfadh Stiúrthóirí ar spéis leo a leithéid ranganna speisialta a chur ar fáil chuige sin, seachas na gnáthranganna Gaeilge do dhaoine fásta. Moltar, leis, go scrúdófaí bealaí eile chun eolas ar an nGaeilge atá á foghlaim ag na páistí a sholáthar do thuismitheoirí, trí 'phacáistí eolais' agus liostaí gearra de nathanna cainte agus de amhráin srl. a ullmhú. D'fhéadfaí pacáistí eolais a ullmhú ar ábhair éagsúla, mar shampla 'conas leabhar as Gaeilge a roghnú do pháiste, agus tábhacht na léitheoireachta', 'úsáid téipeanna' nó 'moltaí faoin nGaeilge a úsáid sa bhaile le do pháiste'. B'fhiú go mór smaoineamh ar fhístéip ghearr a sholáthar ina dtaispeánfaí tuismitheoir agus páiste ag baint úsáide go nádúrtha as an nGaeilge sa bhaile, ag léamh leabhair, ag canadh, agus i mbun gnáthimeachtaí an lae.

- Thuairiscigh thart ar an gcúigiú cuid de na tuismitheoirí gur mhaith leo freastal ar ghrúpaí comhrá sa Ghaeilge. Tharlódh go meallfadh neamhfhoirmiúlacht na ngrúpaí sin roinnt tuismitheoirí níos mó ná mar a mheallfadh ranganna iad, agus chabhródh siad leo siúd a bhí líofa tráth den saol a gcuid líofachta sa Ghaeilge a athghabháil. Moltar don Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta dul i ndáil chomhairle le heagraíochtaí Gaeilge eile, Conradh na Gaeilge, mar shampla, nó Gaelscoileanna, chun a dtacaíocht a lorg do na grúpaí sin. D'fhéadfaí na grúpaí sin a chur ar siúl le linn uaireanta an naíonra do na tuismitheoirí sin a bhíonn ag obair sa bhaile, agus sa tráthnóna do na daoine eile, i dtithe príobháideacha nó i suímh phoiblí. D'fhéadfadh go mbeadh buntáistí ag baint le díriú ar ghrúpaí comhrá i measc tuismitheoirí naíonra nó tuismitheoirí Gaelscoile amháin, rud a thabharfadh spéis chomónta dóibh, agus chun cabhrú le tuismitheoirí naíonra tuairim a fháil faoin dul chun cinn a dhéanfaí amach anseo sna scoileanna lán-Ghaelacha.

- B'fhiú iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar an leas a bhainfí as teagmháil le páistí níos óige fós, trí ghrúpaí Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán. Dúirt beagnach an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí naíonra gur mhaith leo freastal ar ghrúpaí dá leithéid lena bpáistí a bhí níos óige, agus moltar go láidir go bhfriotháilfí orthu. Moltar go gcuirfí treoirábhair ar fáil chun cabhrú le tuismitheoirí ar mhaith leo a leithéid de ghrúpa a bhunú. Comhairlítear go mbeadh na grúpaí seo beag (cúigear nó seisear páistí ar a mhéad), ach gur leor fiú beirt tuismitheoirí agus beirt pháistí ag úsáid na Gaeilge le chéile chun tairbhe a bhaint as a leithéid. I gcás grúpaí níos mó, b'fhéidir go mbeadh sé fónta grúpa comhrá do thuismitheoirí a bheith mar chuid de na cruinnithe sin, dá socrófaí amchlár faoina dtabharfadh tuismitheoir amháin, nó beirt, aire do na páistí fad a bheadh sos gearr ag an gcuid eile de na haosaigh agus seans acu labhairt lena chéile i nGaeilge.

- B'fhiú téipeanna suantraithe i nGaeilge a chur ar fáil chun tuismitheoirí a mhealladh chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid ón tús lena leanaí. Is minic go gcanann tuismitheoirí lena leanaí chun iad a chur a chodladh, ach ní minic go mbíonn suantraithe i nGaeilge ar eolas ag daoine nach cainteoirí dúchais iad. D'fhéadfadh tuismitheoirí na hamhráin seo a fhoghlaim ó théip. Chothódh sin nós na Gaeilge sa teaghlach go luath, agus bheadh téipeanna mar sin áisiúil do theaghlaigh lánGhaelacha chomh maith.

- B'fhiú a fháil amach conas a chuirfí tuismitheoirí agus páistí óga i dteagmháil le cainteoirí dúchais sa Ghaeltacht, agus d'fhéadfadh dreamanna atá ag plé cheana leis an turasóireacht sa Ghaeltacht an smaoineamh sin a chur ar aghaidh. Moltar gearrchúrsaí (seachtaine agus deireadh seachtaine) a eagrú do thuismitheoirí, trí mheán na Gaeilge, chomh maith le himeachtaí do pháistí óga, cosúil leis an scéim atá ag Cumann an Phiarsaigh i nDún na nGall. Ar an gcúrsa seachtaine seo, téann leanaí chuig créis, páistí réamhscoile chuig naíonra agus páistí eile chuig ranganna Gaeilge, fad is atá na tuismitheoirí ag freastal ar rang Gaeilge. Sa tráthnóna bíonn turasanna agus imeachtaí eile don teaghlach ar fad. D'fhéadfadh na cúrsaí seo díriú ar an nGaeilge nó ar imeachtaí eile (potaireacht,nó péintéireacht, mar shampla). B'fhiú smaoineamh ar roinnt scoláireachtaí a sholáthar do theaghlaigh nach mbeadh in ann costais a leithéid de chúrsa a íoc. D'fhéadfaí aird na dtuismitheoirí a tharraingt ar shaoire sa Ghaeltacht trí mheán na nuachtlitreach, agus d'fhéadfadh sé a bheith ina rogha tharraingteach ag a lán. Tríd is tríd, dá n-aithneofaí tuismitheoirí naíonra agus tuismitheoirí pháistí Gaelscoileanna mar mhargadh suntasach bheadh feabhas ar an soláthar seirbhísí a chuirfeadh déileálaithe tráchtála ar fáil dóibh.

- Ní mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar uaireanta an naíonra i gcomhthéacs na mbacanna a bhíonn ar na tuismitheoirí sin is mó a chuirfeadh spéis i naíonraí, nó tá an baol ann go mbeadh ar na tuismitheoirí sin an réamhscolaíocht nó an t-ionad cúraim lae trí mheán an Bhéarla a roghnú. Moltar go smaoineofaí ar sheirbhís bhreise iarnaíonra trí Ghaeilge i gceantair ina mbeadh a leithéid ag teastáil.

Na Naíonraí Gaelacha

- Comhlacht deonach Stiúrthóirí é *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha* a chuireann dearcadh na Stiúrthóirí ar fheidhmiú an Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta in iúl. Cuireann sé fóram teagmhála agus idirghníomhaíochta ar fáil dá chuid ball chomh maith le himeachtaí ar nós *Lá na Naíonraí*. Moltar go bhféadfadh *Na Naíonraí Gaelacha* déileáil go díreach leis na riachtanais sin atá curtha in iúl ag na Stiúrthóirí maidir le tuilleadh teagmhála a bheith acu lena bpiaraí, agus deiseanna a bheith acu ar chuairt a thabhairt ar naíonraí eile. B'fhéidir leas a bhaint as an gcóras atá ann faoi láthair, trína roghnaítear Stiúrthóir chun ionadaíocht a dhéanamh do gach ceantar, chun líonra teagmhála a bhunú do gach dúiche agus roinnt cruinnithe áitiúla a bheith ann, mar a tharlaíonn cheana i gceantair áirithe i rith na gcúrsaí inseirbhíse.

- Deir bunreacht Na Naíonraí Gaelacha go bhfuil mar aidhm acu, i measc aidhmeanna eile, eolas a scaipeadh ar an bpobal faoin luath-thumadh. Is maith an aidhm í seo, mar tá sé an-tábhachtach go mbeadh eolas ag tuismitheoirí faoi na naíonraí, agus faoi na buntáistí a bhaineann le freastal ar naíonra, chun éileamh ar na naíonraí a chothú.

- Moltar go bhféadfadh an eagraíocht seo plé a dhéanamh ar shlite praiticiúla chun na tuismitheoirí a thabhairt isteach níos mó in obair an naíonra (sa naíonra féin nó sa bhaile), más féidir sin agus más cuí. Seans maith go mbeadh gá ag na tuismitheoirí le treoir ó na Stiúrthóirí chun an rannpháirtíocht úd a thionscnamh agus a imlíniú, seachas a bheith ag fanacht ar thuismitheoirí cúnamh mar é a thairiscint.

- Thuairiscigh na tuismitheoirí a dtinreamh féin ag na cruinnithe tionscnaimh a eagraíonn na Stiúrthóirí a bheith íseal go maith. B'fhiú deis a thabhairt do na tuismitheoirí sin, nach n-éiríonn leo a bheith i láthair ag an gcéad chruinniú, freastal ar chruinniú níos déanaí, tar éis dá bpáiste tosú ar fhreastal ar an naíonra. D'fhéadfadh ansin go mbeadh spéis níos mó acu san obair agus dúthracht ina leith. Is den tábhacht é go dtuigfí do na tuismitheoirí sin a bhfuil leibhéil an-íseal sa Ghaeilge acu go bhfáilteofaí rompu, agus go ndéileálfaí leo sa Bhéarla ag na cruinnithe sin.

- Moltar go leanfadh Na Naíonraí Gaelacha, i gcomhar leis na Stiúrthóirí agus na Comhairleoirí, dá dteagmháil leis na bunscoileanna áitiúla agus leis na scoileanna lán-Ghaelacha, d'fhonn an chumarsáid eatarthu a chur chun cinn níos mó fós, agus aistriú líofa a chinntiú ón naíonra go dtí an rang scoile.

Cé gurb iad seo na heagrais is mó a bhfuil baint dhíreach acu leis na naíonraí, is ann d'eagraíochtaí eile ar nós na bhfoilsitheoirí Gaeilge, na leabharlanna agus Bord na Gaeilge a thacaíonn nó a chuireann le hobair na naíonraí, agus féachtar thíos ar chuid de na bealaí ina d'fhéadfaí na seirbhísí sin a úsáid go lánéifeachtach.

Eagraíochtaí Eile

Bhí níos lú ná an tríú cuid de thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta agus níos lú ná an séú cuid de thuismitheoirí na Galltachta a thuairiscigh gur léigh siad i nGaeilge go rialta, nó go minic, dá bpáistí. B'fhiú réamhrá a chur i ngach leabhar le míniú gur fiú leabhar i nGaeilge a léamh do pháistí, agus cur síos ar na straitéisí is fearr chuige. Moltar, chomh maith, go mbeadh siombail de pháiste agus aosach ag léamh leabhair le chéile ar na clúdaigh, chun an bhéim a leagan ar ról na dtuismitheoirí. Tá go leor tuismitheoirí ann nach bhfuil cur amach acu ar na leabhair agus na hábhair Ghaeilge a bhfuil fáil orthu cheana. Bhí an tríú cuid de na tuismitheoirí go léir ar mhaith leo cabhair a fháil agus leabhair is téipeanna á roghnú acu dá bpáiste naíonra. An Gúm is mó a fhoilsíonn leabhair Ghaeilge do pháistí ach tá líon níos lú díobh á fhoilsiú ag comhlachtaí príobháideacha mar shampla Chló Iar-Chonnachta, An Clóchomhar agus Gill & Macmillan. Baineann deacracht ar leith le margaíocht leabhar Gaeilge de bharr go leor siopaí leabhar a bheith ann nach mbacann leo toisc go bhfuil éileamh íseal orthu. Mar sin, bíonn ceannaitheoirí ag brath ar ghlac asraonta speisialaithe. B'fhiú go mór athbhreithniú a dhéanamh ar na fadhbanna a bhaineann le ceannaitheoirí poitéinsiúla a bhaint amach. Faoi láthair comhairlíonn ÁIS do thuismitheoirí leabhair Ghaeilge a ordú trína siopa leabhar áitiúil ach d'fhéadfadh straitéis mar í (an táirge á lorg ag an gcustaiméir) díolachán leabhar Gaeilge a ísliú nuair atá réimse leabhar Béarla ar fáil go héasca. Chun leabhar a hordú, bíonn ar thuismitheoirí eolas a fháil ar leabhair Ghaeilge chun rogha a dhéanamh agus, agus ní bhíonn an t-eolas sin ag cuid mhaith acu. B'fhiú smaoineamh ar chatalóga (ina mbeadh léaráidí as leabhair agus achoimre orthu i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge) a dháileadh ar thuismitheoirí tríd an naíonra, chun eolas ar a bhfuil ar fáil a scaipeadh.

Tá foilsitheoirí eile a fhoilsíonn ábhair do pháistí agus a bhaineann leas as córas na ngníomhairí in Éirinn chun taispeántais leabhar a chur ar bun, mar shampla, do ghrúpaí Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán nó ag maidneacha caife. Ag taispeántas mar seo, is féidir leabhar a scrúdú agus a cheannach láithreach, in ionad é a ordú. B'úsáideach go mór a leithéid de thaispeántais do thuismitheoirí agus Stiúrthóirí araon, agus b'fhiú iad a eagrú, cuir i gcás, ag an gcruinniú tionscnaimh a eagraítear do thuismitheoirí naíonra, nó ag am níos déanaí i gcaitheamh na bliana naíonra, nó ag ócáidí tiomsaithe airgid agus imeachtaí sóisialta. Is den ríthábhacht é go gcuirfí na taispeántais bheaga leabhar seo ar fáil do thuismitheoirí sa Ghalltacht agus sa Ghaeltacht araon, i dtreo is go mbeadh eolas acu ar na hacmhainní tacaíochta teanga atá ar fáil faoi láthair. Ar ndóigh, bheadh sé tábhachtach nach mbraithfeadh Stiúrthóir nó tuismitheoir ar bith faoi bhrú chun earra a cheannach faoin socrú sin, ach dá mbeadh fonn ar thuismitheoirí, go dtaispeánfaí dóibh cad iad na hábhair oiriúnacha atá ar fáil, agus go dtabharfaí seans dóibh iad a cheannach go héasca.

Baineann sé le hábhar anseo gur léirigh taighde (Hickey 1991) go spreagann leabhair théipeáilte páistí chun leabhair T2 a léamh níos minice. Anuas air sin, is acmhainní iad na leabhair théipeáilte do thuismitheoirí nach mbeadh róchinnte faoin bhfoghraíocht nó faoin bhfrásaíocht, agus d'fhéadfadh noda neamhbhriathartha cabhrú leis an tuiscint chomh maith. Forbairt phráinneach a bheadh ann leabhair théipeáilte mar iad a sholáthar sa Ghaeilge, ar a mbeadh an téacs á léamh, agus an ceol agus na fuaimeanna cuí ag gabháil leo.

Ní mór eolas a chur ar fáil do na tuismitheoirí chomh maith i dtaobh na seirbhíse a chuirtear ar fáil sna leabharlanna áitiúla maidir le leabhair Ghaeilge de. Is den riachtanas é go gcuirfeadh na leabharlanna poiblí an réimse leabhar Gaeilge is leithne ar fáil do pháistí. Moltar go rachadh Rannóga na bPáistí agus na Scoileanna i seirbhís leabharlainne na n-údarás áitiúil i gcomhar leis an gComhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta chun a fháil amach cad iad na brainsí leabharlainne atá ag freastal ar gach ceantar ina bhfuil naíonra, i dtreo is go ndíreofaí ar bhrainsí a d'fhéadfadh éileamh a bheith ar leabhair Ghaeilge do pháistí óga iontu. Bheadh sé an-éifeachtach ansin dá ndíreodh na leabharlannaithe aird na dtuismitheoirí agus na bpáistí ar leabhair Ghaeilge, trí thaispeántais speisialta, mar shampla, agus léitheoireachtaí poiblí i nGaeilge.

Ba chóir a mheabhrú go bhfuil Stiúrthóirí i dteideal réimse leabhar oiriúnach i nGaeilge a ordú ón Leabharlannaí sa Bhrainse áitiúil agus ba chóir tuismitheoirí a spreagadh chun na leabhair seo a iarraidh agus a fháil amach ar iasacht go rialta agus, sa tslí sin, éileamh a chruthú a spreagfadh na leabharlanna chun freastal air. Anuas air sin, i gceantair nach mbíonn teacht go héasca ar leabharlann ann, tá córas ann inar féidir le duine aonair, Stiúrthóir naíonra cuir i gcás, bloc-iasacht líon mór leabhar a lorg, ar feadh tréimhse trí mhí. Is féidir na leabhair seo a úsáid sa naíonra agus a thaispeáint do thuismitheoirí le go mbeadh a fhios acu cad atá ar fáil, agus iad a bheith le fáil ar iasacht ón leabharlann nó le ceannach.

Tá de dhualgas ar Bhord na Gaeilge úsáid na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn i measc an phobail, agus dhealródh sé gur réimse tacaíochta fíorthábhachtach ar fad é éifeacht fhreastal ar naíonra ar úsáid bhreise na Gaeilge sa bhaile, agus ar líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge i measc glúine níos óige a mhéadú. Léirítear sa staidéar reatha seo gur gá caighdeán an líonra reatha naíonraí a bhuanú agus a fheabhsú, chomh maith le bunú naíonraí nua a chur chun cinn. I láthair na huaire tá airgeadú bliantúil An Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta (£81,500 i 1995) beag go leor i gcomparáid le maoiniú imeachtaí Gaeilge eile. Níl sé soiléir, ón leibhéal maoinithe seo, go dtuigtear i gceart 'éifeacht an tonnáin' a bhíonn ag tinreamh naíonraí ar theaghlaigh agus ar phobail na bpáistí aonair a fhreastalaíonn ar na naíonraí. Moltar go smaoineofaí ar an bhfóirdheontas a thugtar do pháistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonraí Gaeltachta a leathnú do gach uile naíonra, chomh maith le hardú measartha ar na táillí a ghearrtar ar thuismitheoirí atá in ann níos mó a íoc. Ina theannta sin, chuirfeadh acmhainní breise don Chomhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta le héifeacht na seirbhíse chun ardchaighdeáin a bhuanú agus naíonraí nua a fhorbairt. Mar thoradh ar an infheistíocht bhreise seo, is é is dóchúla go méadófaí ar líon na naíonraí, agus go mbéidís in ann feidhmiú ag ardchaighdeán le líon beag páistí, chun an Ghaeilge a chur chun cinn.

Tá gá, freisin, le tacaíochtaí praiticiúla a chur ar fáil do thuismitheoirí na bpáistí naíonra, mar shampla, chun ábhair a fhorbairt a bheadh dírithe ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile a mhéadú. Chun tosaigh i measc na n-ábhar sin bheadh nuachtlitir rialta chuig gach tuismitheoir naíonra, a thabharfadh eolas dóibh ar imeachtaí tipiciúla sa naíonra, cúrsa ginearálta shealbhú an dara teanga, agus bealaí chun tacú leis an sealbhú sin sa bhaile. Foilsíonn Bord na Gaeilge iris in aghaidh na ráithe, *An Léitheoir*, agus ba mhór an chabhair é dá ndíreodh eagrán de go rialta ar *An Léitheoir Óg agus a Thuismitheoirí* (i gcomhar le club leabhar, b'fhéidir) a chuirfeadh síos ar na leabhair Ghaeilge atá ar fáil do pháistí óga, móide roinnt eolais i mBéarla agus i nGaeilge ar a bhfuil iontu, chomh maith le roinnt léirmheasanna. D'fhéadfaí a leithéid d'eagrán a dháileadh ansin ar thuismitheoirí trí na naíonraí.

Sa deireadh, tá scéim phíolóiteach Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán curtha i gcrích cheana ag Bord na Gaeilge. Moltar go rachadh sé i gcomhairle anois leis an gComhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta agus le grúpaí eile sa tír seo agus sa Bhreatain Bheag a bhfuil scéimeanna cosúil léi i bhfeidhm acu faoi láthair, d'fhonn ábhair a fhorbairt a chuideodh le tuismitheoirí ar spéis leo grúpaí dá leithéid a reáchtáil, agus chun bunú grúpaí mar iad ar fud na tíre a chur chun cinn. B'fhéidir ábhair eile (agus iad bunaithe ar a bhfuil ar fáil sa Bhreatnais) a scaipeadh ar thuismitheoirí naíonra, ag díriú ar spriocanna réalaíocha faoin méid is féidir le tuismitheoirí a dhéanamh i nGaeilge gach seachtain le leanaí óga agus le naíonáin ina dteaghlach féin, nó i ngrúpa Tuismitheoirí agus Tachrán.

8.10 NA NAÍONRAÍ AGUS AN TODHCHAÍ

Agus sinn ag teannadh le mílaois nua, cuirfear éilimh nua ar an ngluaiseacht chun réamhscolaíocht trí Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil. Is é an cheist is práinní ná rialacháin an Acht um Chúram Leanaí (Seirbhísí Réamhscolaíochta) 1996 a chur i bhfeidhm. Éilíonn na rialacháin sin go gcaithfidh na daoine atá ag tabhairt aire do pháistí réamhscoile a chur in iúl don bhord sláinte áitiúil go bhfuil a leithéid de sheirbhís á cur ar fáil acu. Beidh ar na boird sláinte cigireacht a dhéanamh ar sheirbhísí réamhscolaíochta. Tá rialacháin nua i bhfeidhm maidir le coinníollacha áitribh, go háirithe maidir le teas, glaineacht, sábháilteacht dóiteáin, deisiú agus cothabháil, chomh maith le trealamh agus áiseanna. Tá uaschóimheas 10 páiste in aghaidh an aosaigh leagtha síos agus uaslíon 20 páiste go hiomlán sa ghrúpa. Beidh éifeacht ag na coinníollacha sin ar an tslí a fheidhmíonn na naíonraí, agus beidh fadhbanna ar leith ag na Stiúrthóirí sin a chaithfidh athchóiriú a dhéanamh ar an tinreamh nó ar an áitreabh d'fhonn teacht leis na rialacháin. Táthar ag súil go mbeidh tacaíocht éigin ar fáil chun cabhrú leis na Stiúrthóirí na coinníollacha seo a chomhlíonadh, chun titim ar líon na naíonraí a sheachaint. Tríd is tríd, áfach, caithfear fáiltiú roimh an reachtaíocht seo sa mhéid go dtugtar aitheantas níos mó don tábhacht a bhaineann le bheith ag obair le páistí óga, agus go dtugtar faoi chaighdeáin chúraim leanaí a chur ar fáil.

Dúshlán eile a gcaithfidh na naíonraí aghaidh a thabhairt air is ea na hathruithe atá tagtha ar shochaí na hÉireann ó bunaíodh iad nach mór 30 bliain ó shin. Léirigh an Suirbhé ar an Lucht Saothair 1996 méadú mór ar líon na mban i bhfostaíocht íoctha go dtí 38% den lucht saothair. Idir 1995 agus 1996 léirigh an Suirbhé ar an Lucht Saothair titim de 47,000 i measc na mban a bhí gafa le cúraimí tí. Tá méadú, leis, ar líon na dteaghlach tuismitheora aonair. Dhealródh sé go leanfaidh na treochtaí seo sa neastodhchaí agus is dúshlán iad dóibh siúd atá i mbun cúram leanaí. I láthair na huaire tá a dhealramh air nach bhfuil créis ná naíolann ar bith ann a chuireann cúram leanaí lánaimseartha ar fáil trí mheán na Gaeilge; is cosúil nach gcuirtear seirbhísí iarscoile cláraithe ar fáil trí Ghaeilge ach oiread, cé go bhfuil fáil orthu araon trí Bhéarla sna bailte móra agus sna cathracha. Bheadh an t-éileamh ar sheirbhísí den sórt seo trí Ghaeilge níos scaipthe ná a leithéid as Béarla, ach b'fhéidir, ar dtús, go bhféadfaí dóthain leanaí a aimsiú i gceantar ina bhfuil bunscoil lánGhaeilge. Maidir leis na naíonraí de, caithfear féachaint an mbeadh bac ar thuismitheoirí a gcuid páistí a chur ar naíonra toisc a dheacra is a bheadh sé uaireanta oibre an naíonra áitiúil a fhí isteach lena riachtanais oibre féin, agus le socruithe eile a bhaineann le cúram leanaí.

Beidh ról tábhachtach i gcónaí ag an naíonra i gceantair Ghaeltachta amach anseo. Tá tábhacht leis sa chéad áit mar go gcuireann sé réamhscolaíocht ar fáil do pháistí na Gaeltachta agus, sa dara háit, mar go gcuireann sé le cumas Gaeilge na bpáistí Gaeltachta nach bhfuil labhairt na teanga acu sula bhfreastalaíonn siad ar scoil. Is é an dúshlán atá romhainn ná tuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta a spreagadh chun an Ghaeilge a úsáid ag baile sula dtosaíonn na páistí ag freastal ar an naíonra agus ina dhiaidh. Chuige sin, is gá eolas a thabhairt do na tuismitheoirí faoi na buntáistí a bhaineann leis an dátheangachas, agus faoi na samhlacha éagsúla den dátheangachas atá ann (ó úsáid eisiach mionteanga sa bhaile, tríd an tsamhail 'tuismitheoir amháin teanga amháin', go dtí an 'samhail roinnte' ina n-úsáideann an dá thuismitheoir an dá theanga i gcásanna difriúla). Ní mór, leis, a chruthú do thuismitheoirí na Gaeltachta go mbeidh ardchaighdeán sa Bhéarla, teanga cheannasach phobal mór na hÉireann, ag a bpáistí agus iad ag fágail na scoile, agus eolas a thabhairt dóibh faoi na buntáistí a bheadh ann dá bpáistí teagmháil le Gaeilge a bheith acu sa bhaile.

Léirigh an suirbhé go raibh breis is 70% de na páistí naíonra sa Ghaeltacht a raibh tuismitheoir amháin ar a laghad a bhí in ann páirt a ghlacadh 'sa chuid is mó de chomhráite' i nGaeilge, agus is léir gur gá na tuismitheoirí sin atá sách líofa chun Gaeilge a labhairt leis an bpáiste sa bhaile a ghríosú, seachas an Béarla amháin a bheith in úsáid ag an teaghlach go léir. Bheadh buntáistí ann dá gcuirfí tús leis an teagmháil le tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta fiú sula dtosaíonn na páistí ar fhreastal ar naíonra in aois a trí bliana dóibh, d'fhonn úsáid na Gaeilge a spreagadh ag tuismitheoir amháin ar a laghad, nó páirtúsáid na Gaeilge ag duine nó beirt de na tuismitheoirí ón gcéad lá ag baile. D'fhéadfadh na Stiúrthóirí a bheith san áit cheart chuige sin, chun teagmháil a dhéanamh le tuismitheoirí Gaeltachta d'fhonn úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile a éascú, ar an gcoinníoll go bhfaighidís na hacmhainní agus na hábhair d'fhiontar dá leithéid.

Ní mór, chomh maith, líon na naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht a leathnú, chun réamhscolaíocht sa Ghaeilge a sholáthar don chodán ard (timpeall an trí ceathrú cuid) de na páistí idir trí agus ceithre bliana d'aois sa Ghaeltacht oifigiúil nach bhfreastalaíonn ar naíonra faoi láthair. Tá sé níos deacra riachtanais phobail tuaithe a fhreagairt, agus b'fhiú modhanna eile a scrúdú, mar chóras iompair nó síobanna a eagrú, nó uaireanta na naíonraí a chur in oiriúint do na tuismitheoirí áitiúla. Más féidir cur leis an gcumas Gaeilge i measc páistí na Gaeltachta sula dtosaíonn siad ar scoil is mór is fiú é.

8.11 TAIGHDE AMACH ANSEO

- Tá gá le haidhmeanna an naíonra a shainmhíniú níos iomláine, i dtreo is go mbeadh an Stiúrthóir agus an Comhairleoir in ann iad a mheas go leanúnach, agus go hoibiachtúil, de réir réimse critéar mionsonraithe. Sa tslí sin d'fhéadfaí cúnamh agus treoir ar cheisteanna ar leith a chur ar fáil do na Stiúrthóirí sin a mheastar gan a bheith ag feidhmiú ar an leibhéal is airde.
- Sa staidéar seo rinneadh tástálacha ar 225 páiste as 25 naíonra. Ba ghá sampla níos mó de naíonraí agus pháistí dá mbeifí chun iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar éifeachtaí an ranga

(i.e. naíonra) go mion, mar shampla, féachaint ar na héifeachtaí difreálacha a bhainfeadh le réimse stíleanna nó straitéisí teagaisc.

- I láthair na huaire tá staidéar cáilíochtúil breise ar siúl ar pháistí sa naíonra, i gcomhar le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta agus Coimisiún na hEorpa. Beidh deis ansin ar iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar na patrúin idirghníomhaíochta idir an Stiúrthóir agus páistí ag a bhfuil leibhéil éagsúla cumais sa Ghaeilge i naíonraí sa Ghaeltacht. Éascóidh an staidéar breathnadóireachta measúnú ar an modheolaíocht agus ar imeachtaí a mbíonn sampla páistí gafa leo i roinnt naíonraí Gaeltachta. Ní hionann an taithí ar an naíonra ag aon bheirt pháistí, ag brath ar réimse fachtóirí sóisialta, teangeolaíochta agus cumais ghinearálta, chomh maith le fachtóirí eagrúcháin agus bheadh staidéar breathnadóireachta ina chabhair chun anailís a dhéanamh ar thionchar na bhfachtóirí sin, agus chun eolas a chur ar fáil faoi conas déileáil leis na riachtanais éagsúla a bhíonn ag páistí a fhreastalaíonn ar naíonra.
- Gheofaí measúnú as staidéar fad-ama ar an tionchar a bhíonn ag freastal ar naíonra ar dhul chun cinn páistí agus ar a ndearcadh ar an nGaeilge le linn dóibh a bheith ag freastal ar scoileanna lánGhaelacha agus ar ghnáthscoileanna araon.
- Tá iardhaltaí na luathnaíonraí in aois leanbh a iompar anois agus ba dhíol spéise é roinnt staidéar a thionscnamh agus a fháil amach cad d'imigh orthu ó d'fhág siad an naíonra, agus tionchar carnach na n-eispéireas sin ar a ndearcadh ar an nGaeilge agus a húsáid lena bpáistí féin a riaradh.

8.12 CONCLÚIDÍ

Tugann naíonraí taithí dhearfach do go leor páistí ar an réamhscolaíocht, ina spreagtar a bhforbairt ghinearálta, trí bheith ag spraoi le hábhair mar ghaineamh, uisce agus péint, agus cothaítear a bhforbairt shóisialta trí thaithí ar ghrúpa piaraí agus trí chomhoibriú le páistí eile. Anuas air sin, sealbhaíonn siad chomh maith scileanna i dtuiscint agus i labhairt na Gaeilge. Is fiú go mór a thabhairt chun cuimhne gur fearr i bhfad an leibhéal cumais sa Ghaeilge a bhaintear amach sa naíonra ná mar a d'fhéadfaí a bheith ag súil leis in aon saghas réamhscolaíochta eile a bhfuil fáil uirthi faoi láthair, agus is buntáiste é an cumas Gaeilge seo don pháiste a bheadh ag dul ar aghaidh go dtí bunscoil, bíodh sin trí mheán an Bhéarla nó trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Mheabhraigh Hayes (1995) dúinn go bhfuil páistí i dteideal teacht a bheith acu ar oideachas réamhscolaíochta d'ardchaighdeán atá oiriúnach dá n-aois agus dá riachtanais. Ba chóir do stát dátheangach rogha a thabhairt do thuismitheoirí réamhscolaíocht trí mheán na Gaeilge a roghnú dá bpáistí más áil leo. Ba inmhianaithe an tum-réamhscolaíocht a bheith ar fáil do chách, seachas díreach páistí a bhfuil an t-ádh leo cónaí a bheith orthu cóngarach do cheann de líon na naíonraí faoi láthair. Caithfear cuimhneamh go dtéann taithí ar naíonra i bhfeidhm ní hamháin ar an bpáiste aonair, ach ar na tuismitheoirí agus na siblíní chomh maith agus, dá réir sin, go dtéann sí i bhfeidhm méid áirithe ar úsáid teanga agus ar an dearcadh i leith na teanga sa phobal trí chéile. Is den tábhacht é, mar sin, go dtabharfaí aitheantas ceart do ról an naíonra agus na hacmhainní atá ag dul dó, ainneoin go bhfuil an claonadh sin i gcónaí sa tsochaí seo againne gan a luach ceart a thabhairt d'imeachtaí a bhaineann le páistí óga.

Thug Fishman (1991) faoi deara agus athbhreithniú á dhéanamh aige ar na naíonraí, i gcomhthéacs na gluaiseachta chun athrú teanga a aisiompú, go n-éiríonn le páistí naíonra oilteacht a bhaint amach sa tuiscint agus sa ghinchumas araon, agus go sealbhaíonn siad dearcadh láidir dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. Anuas air sin, rinne sé amach go gcothaíonn an naíonra dearcadh dearfach i measc tuismitheoirí as a n-eascraíonn méadú ar éileamh ar bhunscoileanna lánGhaelacha agus a mbunú. Deimhníonn an staidéar seo an comhcheangal dearfach idir freastal ar naíonra agus méadú ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile. Cé nach ionann na méaduithe sin ar úsáid na Gaeilge sa bhaile agus athruithe iomlána ó Bhéarla go Gaeilge i móramh na dteaghlach, is é an toradh atá orthu ná timpeallacht tacaíochta ag páistí chun leanúint d'fhoghlaim na Gaeilge agus, nuair a chuirtear leis sin freastal níos déanaí ar scoileanna lánGhaelacha, d'fhéadfadh tionchar a bheith acu sin ar an Ghaeilge a thabhairt do shiblíní níos óige. Léiríodh sa staidéar seo go raibh tionchar dearfach ar fhoghlaim na bpáistí má chualathas méid áirithe Gaeilge á labhairt sa bhaile, agus caithfear tuismitheoirí a spreagadh, mar sin, chun Gaeilge a labhairt lena bpáistí, fiú laistigh de líon beag comhthéacsanna ar nós leabhair a léamh, agus le linn do na páistí a bheith á ní agus á ngléasadh féin. San iomlán, is cosúil go bhfuil ról an-luachmhar ag an naíonra agus an Ghaeilge á seachadadh isteach sa bhaile aige, agus sin ag am nuair is geal le páistí a gcuid scileanna nuafhoghlamtha a léiriú agus fonn orthu go mbeadh baint ag a dtuismitheoirí sa spéis nua seo. Braitheann tuismitheoirí gur féidir leo i gcónaí a gcion féin a dhéanamh chun cabhrú lena bpáistí an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim, más sách íseal féin é a gcumas inti.

Toradh suntasach eile ar fhreastal ar naíonra is ea an cineál teanga leanbh-lárnaí a thugtar do na páistí agus dá dtuismitheoirí, rud atá in easnamh de ghnáth i measc foghlaimeoirí teanga T2, mar is eol do gach cainteoir T1 óna óige féin. Is den deargriachtanas é eolas a bheith ar rainn naíolainne, ar amhráin agus ar chluichí gníomhaíochta agus aran bhfoclóir chun plé a dhéanamh ar mhothúcháin, ar réimse spéiseanna agus ar riachtanais fhisiceacha agus intleachtúla leanaí óga chun tarchur idirghlúine a thionscnamh, agus tig leis an naíonra an tsainréim teanga seo a chur ar fáil do thuismitheoirí agus do pháistí, sainréim nach gcuirtear ar fáil de ghnáth sa chóras scolaíochta foirmiúil.

Is é croí an scéil é ná go dtugann na naíonraí sealbhú na Gaeilge céim níos cóngaraí don bhaile, nó go dtí 'an neicseas idirghlúine' mar a thugann Fishman (1991:413) air, tarlaíonn go n-oibríonn siad le leanaí óga agus go spreagann siad rannpháirteachas na dtuismitheoirí, rud a d'fhéadfadh dul i bhfeidhm amach anseo ar tharchur na bpáistí sin chuig a gclann féin. Go deimhin, feidhmíonn an naíonra mar a bheadh droichead ann idir an córas scolaíochta agus an baile, trí bhaint a bheith aige le páistí agus iad ag an aois sin a nglacann na tuismitheoirí leis go gcaithfidh baint a bheith acu le himeachtaí a gcuid páistí, agus trí bhéim a chur ar an tábhacht a bhaineann le páirt na dtuismitheoirí san fhoghlaim a dhéanann na páistí ar an nGaeilge. Is ar an gcúis sin gur féidir na naíonraí a mheas mar lúb ríthábhachtach i slabhra na hathbheochana teanga, agus is lúb í a íocfaidh amach anseo as tacaíocht institiúideach agus airgeadais níos mó a fháil.